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Contents for November 1916

Silver Slippers *A Complete Novel* Jackson Gregory 3

For a tale packed with action, sheer, man-sized action, and a plot that holds you to the last line, this great novel of the range-lands has the "edge" on most stories of the year. Here's where you meet a bunch of real sons of the open West. And when they tackle the power that is sweeping their ranges of cattle, there sure is something doing.

On the Strength of the Evidence M. S. Wightman 67

A strong story of Pacific transport life, told by a man who knows the sea. Would-be detectives can have a try at untangling a baffling snarl of circumstances. And the "wise ones" will get a rude jolt of surprise.

For the Love of Annibel W. C. Tuttle 75

An angel steps into a Western ranch-town and helps the boys put on an amateur melodrama, with an emotional bronc in the leading rôle. Fun from box-office to footlights—and beyond.

He Said He Would George L. Catton 84

So, after three failures, he went back to his little claim far north of the Yukon. And he vowed he'd bring back ten thousand in gold or never return—to her. You'll want to hear the story of that cartridge-belt that still swings in the wind from the limb of a stunted spruce.

The Chase of the Four Fools *A Three-Part Story. Part I.* Patrick and Terence Casey 90

Far back into the wilds of Borneo, back to that unknown mountain fastness where dwell the golden women, plunge *Colum*, *Fitzhamon*, *DeJong*, and *Harry Christmas*. And their search is for *William Hyde*, he who found the Jallan Batoe and saw with his own eyes the Green, Green God, a parrot of solid emerald. Adventures pile one upon the other in this startling land of head-hunters and orchids the color of blood.

"Suds" Edward S. Pilsworth 124

An international boundary; a few dozen bandits; miles and days of alkali; these mean nothing to *Suds* when the light of his young life has been stolen. He's a scrapper—a real "go-getter."

A Ragged Mountain Romance M. R. Cochrane 131

Up in the Ragged Mountains of Virginia each man is a law unto himself. This is a love-story that you'll not soon forget.

(Continued on next page)

1

(Continued from preceding page)

Billy June and the Amazon Railroad Scandal **Wilbur Hall** 138

It's up to our old friend *June* to save the Brazilian Government millions and to nab the power behind one of the biggest hold-up games ever "pulled" in South America. This time *June* meets a crook worthy of his steel.

In the Grip of the Minotaur *A Four-Part Story. Conclusion* . . . **Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur** 150

Now comes the last tremendous struggle between the Norsemen and those who rule the Mediterranean world; a struggle of the new against the old, the virile against the decadent. And *Ragnarr* at last meets the Minotaur.

The Song of Ilia **Richard Butler Glaenzer** 187

The World Next Door **William Dudley Pelley** 188

A dramatic tale of the days when British soldiers fought to carry the light of civilization to darkest Africa, and of a girl who followed her soldier sweetheart to the end.

Wrecked **Robert J. Pearsall** 196

You who love the sea, its romance, its eternal battle against puny, man-made things, will feel the sting of the spray and hear the booming of canvas as only a skilled sea-writer can bring it to those of us who must stay at home.

The Heels of Chance **Arthur D. Howden Smith** 204

Captain McCaughy and his crew of psalm-singing fighters will never stay behind when the strongest of the Turkish defenses guarding the road to Constantinople are to be stormed. Nor can *McCaughy's* men be stopped till their drive leads—but you'll find out where it leads. This adventure eclipses all their others.

The Camp-Fire *A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers* 218

Headings **C. B. Falls**

The December Adventure

will bring you an extra good lot of stories. On sale November 3.

HIDDEN COUNTRY

By HENRY OYEN

A full book-length novel by one of the writers our readers like best. A tale of both sea and land, of gold and romance and adventure. Mr. Oyen has not abandoned his old field, but you'll be glad he has shifted his scenes in this case.

TUTTLE

The trouble with most humorists who write stories is that they're self-made. Only God can make a real humorist. *Adventure* has found a few, and no one of them is more surely a natural-born, spontaneous, contagious humorist than is W. C. Tuttle. We "discovered" him and we're proud of it. There's one of his tales in this issue and another in December.

ALSO rattling good stories by Thomas Addison, J. M. Allen, Patrick and Terence Casey, George L. Catton, Wallace Davis, William H. Hamby, Wilbur Hall, Berthe Knatvold Mellett, Robert J. Pearsall, Clarence Phillips (another *real* humorist), General B. J. Viljoen.

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THE UNIVERSITY
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1916



Silver Slippers A Complete Novel by Jackson Gregory

Author of "Yahoyá," "The Red Law," etc.

WHEN "Hard" Ross was mad he wasn't a pretty thing to look upon. His rage surged upward through his sunburned cheeks and flared like fire into his gray-blue eyes that were usually cool. The men who went to him for orders and pay and in whose strong hands the destinies of the Up and Down Cattle Range had resided for a matter of years were not afraid of him, since they were not the sort of men to be afraid of anything that walked or had a name in the dictionary. But they had a way, at times like this, of going very quietly about their business.

"Do about it!" bellowed Hard Ross at the half dozen quiet men in the bunk-house. "What am I going to do about it, huh? The law, you say, Harper? Yes, the law,

by high Heaven! The law that men have gone to ever since Adam, a long time before the time of crooked sheriffs and rotten judges! The ol' law, the law there ain't no bribin' an' buyin' up, the law of a man's right hand!"

It was a long speech for Hard Ross to make before breakfast, a rare bit of eloquence from him at any time and the men looked at him curiously. Even Sunny Harper, whose yellow, tousled hair and eternal grin gave him his name, condescended to be serious.

"What's happened recent?" he asked. "Everything was all right when we hit the hay las' night."

"All right?" cried Hard Ross angrily. "You mean we thought it was. Is it all right if a man goes to sleep with a rattler in

his blankets or a skunk under his pillow, jus' because he don't know he's got that kind of company? It wasn't all right any more'n it's been off an' on for a year now. Only this time I got something I can put my hands on!"

Here was something interesting, almost tangible in the storm of the foreman's anger. The men, to the last man of them, looked at him with something sharp and expectant in their eyes.

"It's Silver Slippers this time!" Hard Ross flung it at them as he might have hurled a missile at the head of a man he hated. "She's gone!"

"Silver Slippers?" queried Little John Sperry, his voice a weak, incredulous gasp. "Why, I tied her in her stall las' night, Ross. I watered her an' fed her the las' thing."

"An' she's clean gone this mornin'," snapped Hard Ross.

"Maybe she broke away an'—" began Little John a bit eagerly.

"Maybe I'm a fool, huh?" Ross cut him short. "Maybe she shut the barn door after she went out, after I dropped the bolt in the staple, huh? There's no maybe about it; she's stole the same as one — of a lot of other things has been stole durin' less'n a year. An' this time I got both eyes open, an' I'm gettin' the deadwood on the man I want! You boys jus' set still an' watch an' you'll see something."



THEY sat still, all but Hard Ross who stood at the open door and the cook who remained by his stove, a black stream of steaming liquid escaping from the coffee-pot in his hands and spattering upon the rough boards of the floor. And then another man came in, a big fellow with round, muscular shoulders and smoldering eyes.

He came to the door from the well where he had been washing, glanced carelessly about the long, low room, saw Hard Ross and the thing so plainly read in Hard Ross's eyes and started back. Every movement this man made was quick, but his leap now, sideways and back, was not quick enough. Hard Ross's big hands had flashed outward, they had settled upon the other man's shoulders, they had jerked him off of his feet and into the room and slammed him back so that his shoulders struck heavily against the wall.

"Hawley," said the foreman, his voice

quiet now, his eyes alight with a perfect joy of rage, "I'm goin' to give you the beatin' of your life!"

"What's the matter?" cried the man Hawley, his big hands wrenching at the other man's wrists. "What's eatin' you, Ross? Jus' because you happen to be boss here you ain't goin'——"

For answer Hard Ross jerked his right hand free and with his hard muscles cording to the effort drove it straight from the shoulder into Hawley's face.

The man's head snapped back, striking the wall, he swayed a moment, all but stunned from the one blow, then at last wrenched away from the one hand holding him and sprang to one side. As he leaped the blood was running across a cut cheek and cut lips, his face was distorted with a wrath no less than Ross's, his hand flew to his hip pocket.

"You —— fool," he gasped chokingly. "I'll kill you for that."

But Hard Ross was not a fool and he had no wish for pistol play this morning. He too leaped forward. He struck again before Hawley's hand could go the little journey to bulging hip pocket, and there was no man there in the bunk-house who could have taken that second blow square in the face and stood up under it.

Hawley did not reel now; he fell heavily, not partially stunned but stunned entirely, and where he fell he lay very still.

Suddenly it was very quiet in the bunk-house. The cook remembered his coffee-pot and placed it back upon the stove. The men who had pushed back their chairs from the breakfast-table, came forward looking at the man on the floor.

"You mean he done it?" queried Sunny Harper gently.

"I've jus' explained what I mean in words a young baby might understan'," grunted Ross. He stooped, jerked the revolver from Hawley's pocket and flung it under one of the bunks. "Give him some water, cookie. Out'n the bucket."

But it was Sunny Harper who brought a bucketful of cold water from the well and splashed it over the unconscious man's face and wrists. And in a little Hawley opened his eyes, wiped the blood from his face and sat up. And as he moved his body the man moved his right hand. It went swiftly to his hip, found an empty pocket, and dropped again to the floor.

"What's the nex' play?" he asked rather coolly. His eyes, hard, sharp, malevolent were upon the foreman's. "I'm down an' out, I guess, seein' as how you took me when I wasn't lookin'."

"I jus' naturally took you as soon as I could get you," grunted Ross. "I couldn't wait, that's all."

"An' now maybe you're goin' to tell me what you done it for?" with a keen question shot at him from the smoldering eyes.

"No, I ain't. Seein' as you know as well as I do! But I'm goin' to tell the other boys an' there ain't no objection to you listenin'. You boys know how I put this Hawley on the pay list more'n a month ago. You know we didn't need an extra man real bad, an' you wondered why I done it, I reckon? I put him on because I had the hunch he was a crook, that's why!

"There's another man we've all got our eyes on quite a spell now, an' that's Bull Plummer of the Bar Diamond outfit. Well, I'd seen this man Hawley with Plummer, chummy as two of a kind, las' time there was races in town, an' I made the bet when he showed up for a job that Plummer was back of it, an' that means something crooked. So I put him on an' watched him.

"Durin' the las' two months there ain't been any cattle lost, but I figgered he was jus' gettin' solid with us firs'. An' then, las' night, he couldn't stan' it any longer. I heard him come back into the bunk-house about two o'clock, an' I hadn't heard him go out. But now it's plain as print to me that he's the gent who stole the fines' blood-ed little mare as ever was foaled this side the Rockies. An' a man as lays a hand on Silver Slippers gets what Hawley jus' got."

Hawley, sneering, drew himself up and stood against the wall.

"What do you think I done with her?" he demanded. "I went outside to get a drink, an' was gone about ten minutes. Think I et her?"

Ross shook his head.

"I don't know what's gone with her," he replied bluntly. "She's gone. It's a frame-up of some kind. I reckon you put up the job with Plummer an' he rode over or sent one of his yellow crowd to take her off your hands."

The smile which came and lingered upon Hawley's cut lips was not a pretty thing:

"You're sure great at guessin' things," he said slowly. "Only you're quite some ways

off in your guesswork, Mr. Ross. An' as for proof——"

"Proof!" snorted Ross, flaring up again. "Do you take me for the sort of man that's goin' to wait for proof? I know you're a —— crook an' I know you had a hand in the takin' of Silver Slippers, jus' as you've had a hand in a whole lot of Bull Plummer's rotten play. That's enough for me, Hawley. Now, listen to this: Do you want to know why I jus' beat you up a little instead of killin' you outright as you deserve?"

"I ain't curious," muttered Hawley.

"All right. But then maybe the res' of the boys has got a right to know why I'm bein' so gentle with you after you've laid your dirty paws on the fines' little mare as ever slapped her feet down on a cow range. An' I'm tellin' 'em so's you can hear if you want to! Boys," and his deep voice went husky with the new emotion in it, "you know I'm puttin' it straight when I say that there never was a mare that could make Silver Slippers eat her dust. An' what I'm goin' to say maybe sounds mushy, but I don't care a bum nickel what it sounds like. It's so, an' I ain't the man to shy at the truth."

And yet he did shy a little and hesitated and cleared his throat before he went on.

"It sounds funny, comin' from a man like me," the foreman continued, shifting a bit uneasily under many watchful eyes. "But I reckon there is jus' one thing in the world as counts. An' it's love! Now wait a minute," with sudden fierceness, "until I can finish what I've begun, or I'll have to beat somebody else up this mornin'. It's love I'm sayin' an' that's about what I'm meanin'. There's diff'rent kinds of love. I ain't ever loved a woman an' I ain't goin' to. I ain't ever been mad in love with whisky nor with poker. I don't know as a man can say I've been crazy mad in love with life, even. But Silver Slippers—my Gawd! I raised her from a suckin' filly, an' I broke her an' no man but me has ever slapped a leg across her back. Now you know what I mean?"

For a brief, uncertain moment the man's hard eyes were unbelievably soft, and more than one man there, wondering, saw that they were wet. And then, suddenly swinging about upon Hawley so that he shrank back from what he saw in eyes no longer soft or wet, Hard Ross cried harshly:

"Why didn't I pound the last spark of

life out'n you? Why? Jus' because I want that little mare back! Jus' because you're the one man I know who can go get her for me. An' I'm passin' it to you straight, Hawley, if you waste any time puttin' Silver Slippers back there in the barn, without a scratch on the silk of her hide, why then, so help me, I'm goin' to kill you!"

Hard Ross's jaws shut with a little click of the large, strong teeth. He turned abruptly and went to the breakfast-table. The other men, silent for a little, went to their chairs. Hawley, his face dead-white save for the scarlet threads of blood across it, turned and went down to the corral for his horse.

And then a stranger came into camp and everything was forgotten in the shock of his coming.

II



IT IS a saying in the West that "The law and barb-wire fences travel together; one is as treacherous as the other; and when they both come the cattle country has got to move on."

The law and barb-wire fences had not yet invaded the mountain valleys in the Up and Down country. Sheriffs were not unheard of but the district was big and wild and eminently self-dependent, and men had not forgotten the world-old way of settling their own troubles with their hands.

The Up and Down had been having its troubles for upward of a year now. Trouble upon the range is apt to mean just one thing: the loss of cattle from one reason or another. And, where fences and law have not come, the loss is very likely explained by the one word, "Rustlers." For, wherever there are men there are strong men and weak, good men and bad, and wherever there are cattle and the opportunity there are men to seek the short cut to gold or the gallows.

When the creation piled the high masses of the mountains and carved the deep-sided valleys the opportunity was made. The Up and Down range had its natural boundaries, defined since Time was young. There was the valley, twenty miles of it in length, so narrow here and there that a cowboy riding upon one edge under the cliffs might pick off with his Winchester a deer browsing upon the far side, bulging in places to a width of half a dozen miles. It was the Valley of the Twin Lakes.

At the "Upper End" the creek which carried away the surplus of the two little lakes' clear water to wander westward through the valley had its beginning under tall sheer cliffs in a white froth over echoing waterfalls. For a man to climb the cliffs there on foot was a day's work; for him to climb them on horseback was an impossibility. There was one of the range's Nature-made fences.

Upon the two sides of the valley, north and south, the mountains stood steep in roughly parallel lines extending almost to the "Lower End," twenty miles away. There were spots here and there, tiny passes, through which it was possible for cattle to work their way out and up, across the uplands and so over into a neighboring range. But out of the score of men taking their pay from Hard Ross, foreman, there were always men whose allotted duty it was to visit these gorges daily, to see that there were no restless steers seeking to leave the home range, to examine the ground for the tracks which would tell if even a calf had gone that way.

And still, with all precautions, again and again during the year cattle had been lost. They were gone from the range and no precautions which the foreman took, no close night herding, had been able to lessen the losses. A dozen big steers had gone in one herd and that when big steers were worth seventy dollars a head. They hadn't gone away of their own will, they hadn't gone through the little passes, that much Hard Ross knew. But that was all that he did know about it. They were gone, eight hundred dollars gone in a night. And picked cattle, too. The man who had engineered their theft had gone coolly about it, he had picked and chosen, he had defied vigilance, he had laughed at precautions.

And that was not all. Again and again a steer, three or four beef cattle, "turned up missin'."

It was Bull Plummer's work. That was the one thing of which at last Hard Ross was growing more and more positive. For, certainly, of all men no man had a better opportunity than Bull Plummer to do this sort of thing, and no man had a harder reputation.

Plummer was owner and his own foreman of the Bar Diamond outfit, and the Bar Diamond lay paralleling the Up and Down just across the ridge to the west. If once Plummer and the hard crowd taking their

wages from him could get the cattle across the ridge and into Bar Diamond territory the rest would be simple enough. From there it was only a night's drive to the railroad, and, to the cattleman, railroad and crooked business were synonymous.

Such were conditions upon the morning when Hard Ross lost a mare five hundred dollars could not have bought, lost his temper and bruised his fist upon the face of Hawley, the new man.

"Anyway," muttered Ross as he watched the men going down to the corrals for their horses, "one good thing, I don't have to report this to the Ol' Man down in the city. It's my loss an' it ain't his. An' I'm sick an' tired makin' reports how more stock is lost."

He didn't know yet what he was going to know in five minutes: He had made his last report to the owner in the city. He went back into the bunk-house, took up his hat and tobacco, and turned again to the door. Then it was that he saw the stranger coming into camp.



HE WAS a strange sort of stranger, his way of coming more strange still, and big Ross grunted his disgust. The road into the valley from the nearest town, White Rock, thirty miles away, was as poor a road as a man ever strove manfully to engineer a Studebaker wagon along. And yet, coming up over a knoll in the floor of the valley, was a big red touring-car.

The automobile's engine was resting; the propelling power was a team of mules; the car rocked and jolted along behind a heavy log chain; a man riding on horseback at the side of the mules handled the reins and the necessary flow of language; and another man, the stranger, sat smiling upon the seat of his car and gazing with mild eyes upon the landscape through a pair of nose spectacles.

"A city guy comin' campin'," grunted Hard Ross jamming his hat hard down over his brows. "He'll be shootin' at deer an' killin' my cattle for me."

Then the mules came down the knoll at a swinging trot, the driver jerked them to a standstill in front of the bunk-house, and the man in the car smiled pleasantly upon Hard Ross and wished him an amiable good-morning. The boys at the corrals saw, saddened swiftly and rode back to the bunk-house to gaze upon the newcomer.

The newcomer smiled upon them all and got down. He had all the "earmarks of a city guy, all right." In the first place he wore a stiff hat, a derby. Then he wore nose-glasses. Then he was dressed in patent ties, in neatly tailored and pressed gray suit, in new tan gloves. A fishing-rod, newly bought in White Rock, thrust its way upward like a mast; a rifle in brand-new case stood in the corner of the tonneau, there were suit-cases and traveling-bags innumerable. These things the cowboys saw before they saw the man himself.

Then the man under the clothes. He looked insignificant as he sat in his automobile, but on the ground, standing upon legs from which he strove to drive the cramp and stiffness, it appeared that he was a tall, rangy, not ungraceful young fellow of perhaps twenty-five or thirty, who might have posed nicely for the pictures of Kutteneimers' Swell Suits which decorated the sign-boards just outside of White Rock.

One hand came out of its tan glove and showed soft and white. There was a smudge of ink upon the thumb and forefinger which Ross was quick to see and which caused another disgusted grunt.

He was close shaven, had shaved last night. He wore a gaily colored vest, a high white collar of the latest fashion, just like the collar the Kutteneimer Swell Suit pictures wore, a tie of bluebird blue, a diamond stickpin. His eyes were a soft brown, filled with much mild curiosity as they ranged from Hard Ross to the rest of the boys.

"Which one of you men is Mr. Ross?" he asked when nothing but stares and still tongues greeted his arrival.

"I am," answered Ross shortly. "What do you want?"

The young man offered his hand and his name together.

"I'm Mr. Sherrod." He added a smile to the two other offerings, "I've come to stay with you a while."

There was no glad hospitality in Hard Ross's sniff. He had troubles enough already. But the young man ran on quickly, drawing back his hand from the clutch Ross had been pleased to give him and wiping it upon a bit of white linen:

"I've brought you a letter from Mr. Hodges." He felt in his pockets, seemed alarmed, muttered, "Mercy! I'm afraid I've lost it—no," with his beaming smile coming back. "Here it is."

And he handed it to the foreman.

Ross took it swiftly, a little angrily, his sole thought that this young whippersnapper was some friend of Mr. Hodges, the owner of the Up and Down, and that the letter was asking Ross to make his stay a pleasant one, to have one of the boys show him where the best trout-fishing was to be found, to point out the likely places for deer, to watch over him so that he didn't fall off a cliff somewhere or take a drop into one of the little lakes and drown. And what Hard Ross read was this:

DEAR ROSS:

This will inform you that I have sold the Up and Down, brand and all, to Mr. Sherrod to whom this will introduce you.

D. M. HODGES.

Hard Ross's comment was brief, characteristic, and perhaps all that could be expected. He looked from the letter in his hand to the touring-car, to the man who had handed it to him, and said softly—

"Well, I'll be ——!"

One would have said that young Mr. Sherrod's smile was one of the brand warranted not to come off. He lifted his eyebrows, adjusted his glasses and beamed.

"Something of a surprise, eh?" he chuckled. "Well, well, so it is to me, my good fellow. But I had a pile of money, you know, and I was deuced well tired of the usual thing, you know, so I thought I'd have a try at it. Say, it's great out here, isn't it? And all this is mine now? This whole valley, those cows over yonder, the cliffs, the view and all? I'm going to have the time of my life. I say, Ross, give this other fellow a hand with my traps, there's a good fellow. I dare say the cook's got some coffee and biscuits and eggs? I'll run in and have a mouthful. I rode all night." He beamed over his shoulder, as he turned to the bunk-house door. "I wanted to get here before the men went to work. You men wait until I come out. You take your orders from me, you know."

For a moment there was silence as Mr. Sherrod disappeared in search of breakfast. Then, simultaneously, there came a stifled curse from Hard Ross and a burst of laughter from the men upon their horses, a peal of merriment in which Sunny Harper's musical baritone led in a paroxysm of pure glee.

A cowpunch isn't afraid of work, and

does many things during the day which soil the physical hands of him. He doesn't mind that. But if there is a thing he abhors more than he does a sheep-herder it is the type of human, called man for want of a proper name, who dances around at the best of the idle rich, doing petty, servile things which the idle rich should do for himself. The other men laughed, Hard Ross swore again and with deeper, fuller meaning, and Mr. Sherrod's things stayed in the automobile.

"As if it wasn't bad enough already," bellowed the foreman. "An' now a man like him comes an' is goin' to give his own orders, an' the Up an' Down is goin' to eternal smash in a handbasket."

"Look out, Ross," grinned Little John. "He'll hear you an' you'll get yourse' fired. He don't need a foreman, anyhow."

"An' I don't want the job of keeper for a crazy man or mama for a mollycoddle," snorted Ross. "Let him fire."

And yet the coming of the man, fashionable clothes, inconsequential air and city manner had had their sober effect. The men, about to begin the day's work, were suddenly stopped and must await the word he chose to give them. For he was the owner, and after all, though they had lived on the range long before he had heard of it, though it was to them home, they were but hired men who must obey his orders or quit.

Evidently Mr. Sherrod was hungry and had little thought to the idle men waiting for him. It was close to half an hour before he came out to them, carefully lighting a huge black cigar.

He was evidently in a very contented frame of mind. The line of his chest showed prominently under the gay-colored vest, his eyes were filled with smiling satisfaction as once more they swept the faces about him and went their way to the steep walls of the valley. Then he seemed to remember the first and only order he had been pleased to give, saw his baggage still where he had left it, and turned, frowning, to Ross.

"I say," he called sharply. "I said you were to take those things into the house for me. Didn't you hear me?"

"I sure enough heard you," was Ross's surly answer. "I been holdin' down my job quite some time as puncher first an' foreman next, but I'm —— if I ever agreed to stand aroun' like a boot-lickin' valet. If you want that truck moved I reckon the

best way is to get in an' move it yourse'."

There was a note of finality in Hard Ross's tone. The day had begun badly for him, the spirit within him was still sore and chafed, the early anger was not yet entirely cooled. Else he might have grinned and taken the new owner's orders. But the spirit of revolt was high in him now, and there was no man who walked that Hard Ross was in the mood to take any sort of order from.

Mr. Sherrod's eyes showed a vast amazement. He pushed his derby far back upon his head, adjusted his glasses and stared. His expression was that of a tourist in a far land being showed one of the wonders of the world.

"You mean," he said slowly, as if he groped in the dark of a stupefied brain for each word, "that you refuse to do what I tell you to do?"

Any answer was so very unnecessary that Hard Ross made none. He stared back, his contempt leaping high up in his eyes. Sunny Harper giggled like a girl in her teens and then grew gravely and suddenly interested in the loose leather about his saddle horn.

"I'd have you understand," said Mr. Sherrod with dignity, "that this range is mine. It's been mine for a month. You've been drawing pay from me. And if my servants won't do what I tell them——"

"Servants!" boomed Hard Ross, his face red, his big hands twitching. "Servants, you little hop-o'-my-thumb! Why you say that to me again and I'll slap your face for you!"

A little thing, perhaps, this slip of the tongue of Mr. Sherrod's. But then to a man like Hard Ross and upon a day like today. . . .

"Mercy!" gasped the new owner of the Up and Down. "You—you impudent boor! I—I—if you so much as laid a hand on me I'd have you arrested and sent up for six months! I—I've a notion to have you arrested, anyway. Mr. Hodges has told me how his cattle, my cattle now, have been stolen. I thought it looked funny."

"Hold on!" shouted Hard Ross angrily. "You go easy, little cock-of-the-walk. You jus' hint I ain't straight——"

"I believe you're what you look like," fumed Mr. Sherrod. He drew a step backward and spat out: "You act like a cattle-thief, you look like a cat——"

Whether his meaning ended there, whether he sought to affirm that he had discovered something feline in the glare in Hard Ross's eyes, or whether he was going to explain that the man looked like a rustler, was not made plain.

Hard Ross's nerves were tingling. Hard Ross's hand was twitching again. He struck—Mr. Sherrod had not stepped far enough back—his open palm smote heavily upon the freshly shaven cheek; and the new owner of the Up and Down measured the length of his immaculate suit upon the dust by the bunk-house door.

III



"YOU little weak-eyed rabbit!" choked Hard Ross and he stood over the form prone upon the ground, both big fists doubled now with knuckles fast growing white. "I've stood about all my constitution's good for since sunup. You get up an' you apologize, or by all that's holy I'll slap the white face clean off'n you."

This from man to master! This from a hired cowhand to a man who must be close to a millionaire to purchase an outfit like the Up and Down! Mr. Sherrod gazed at him as if stupefied and made no attempt to get to his feet. He moved a little, found the glasses at his side, held them up to his nose and stared up into the flushed face above him. From it he stared at the circle of other faces. And when he had seen only rage on the one distorted countenance, amused contempt on the others, he fumbled with his glasses, dropped them and said querulously:

"I say, Ross, this is no way to cut up, you know. I—I may have been mistaken. I—well, I was a trifle angry, I suppose. No doubt you are honest enough."

Ross turned his back square upon the owner of the Up and Down.

"You boys don't take any more orlers off'n me," he said quietly. "It's up to you an' this city guy."

And he strode back to the bunk-house, slammed the door after him and went to throwing into a barley sack what few of his personal effects he would take with him when he rode out looking for a new job.

Mr. Sherrod looked after the rude departure with uplifted eyebrows, and then got slowly to his feet, one hand laid upon

the cheek which Hard Ross had struck, the other beating the dust out of his trousers and coat.

"I call you men to witness that the assault was unprovoked," he said sharply. "Now, go about your work. Do whatever that man had told you to do for the day. I—I'm a trifle upset. Any man with any sort of sensibilities would be. Merciful goodness! I'll give you your orders tomorrow."

They went, went in a whirlwind of dust and gleeful laughter, seeking as much to hide the one as the other. And Mr. Sherrod took a step toward the bunk-house door, stopped, rubbed his chin reflectively, and finally threw the door open.

"You're going to quit?" he demanded, his foot on the threshold.

"No," snapped Ross. "I've quit already."

"I—is it necessary," he said hesitatingly, "for you to go this way, without any warning?"

"For the love of God!" cried Hard Ross wonderingly. "Do you want me to knock you down first and then keep on working for you?"

"Why, I don't want you to knock me down at all. I never wanted that. But I say, a man ought to be reasonable. I want you to stay a day or so and sort of look after things until I can get my hand in. Oh," hurriedly, "no doubt the work is easy enough and simple. But then for a man to pitch right in, his first day on a cow ranch, and run it—come now. Be a good fellow, Ross. I made a mistake and we'll forget it. I want you to stay."

Hard Ross put down his sack, went to a bunk, sat down and sought for paper and tobacco.

"I don't quite get you, stranger," he said heavily. "I jus' knocked you as flat as a door-mat, didn't I? An' now you're askin' me to forget an' stick on the job? Say, what are you givin' me?"

"I'm giving you seventy-five dollars a month and board and room," the new owner answered quickly. "And I tell you I want you to run this thing for me until I can get the swing of it. It may take me a month, I don't know how long."

"A month!" gasped Hard Ross. He forgot to roll into a cigaret the tobacco he had poured into his paper. "You learn to run a cow outfit in a month!"

"Well, well," said Sherrod quickly. "I'll do my best. And, say, you'll stay won't you? There's a good fellow."

Ross looked at him with open, un concealed contempt. But Hard Ross was thinking. Jobs like this were not plentiful. If he gave this one up he might be months in getting anything better than the poor wages the rest of the boys drew. Then there was Bull Plummer still to settle with, and there were Hawley and Silver Slippers. Somehow it galled him to keep his place under a man like Sherrod. And yet . . .

"It's your range, Mr. Sherrod." He shrugged his heavy shoulders. "If you want me to stay, why I'll stay."

"Then it's settled," Mr. Sherrod sighed and came on into the room.

He found a chair, disposed his tall frame in it languidly, brought a fresh cigar from his vest-pocket, saw through his nose-glasses that the fine Sumatra wrapper had come to grief in his recent violent meeting with his tempestuous foreman, tossed it away, selected another, lighted it very carefully and surveyed Hard Ross through the upcurling smoke.

"I want a word or two with you before the day's work begins."

"Fire ahead," muttered Hard Ross.

"I've brought an outfit along with me," said Mr. Sherrod with dignity. "I got it in the city and the man who sold it to me told me that it was just a little bit of all right. Now, I'm in for this game, Ross, and I'm going to start today. First thing, I want you to look over my things and pass on them. Will you do it?"

Ross grumbled out a curt, "Sure." Mr. Sherrod seemed upon the point of giving an order, hesitated and rising swiftly went out to his touring-car. From his pile of baggage he brought forth a neat black bag which with his own white hands he lugged into the bunk-house. From the bag he brought forth articles which caused Hard Ross to gasp with astonished amusement.

There were all the "trimmings" of a theatrical cowpuncher. A brand-new Stetson with two feet of soft brim, a scarlet neck-scarf, a bright blue silk shirt, a pair of black boots with monstrously high heels, a pair of spotlessly white chaps, a bridle with Spanish bit whose silver chasings flashed gaily in the morning sunlight. And—Hard Ross drew in a deep, lung-filling breath and nearly choked on it—there was a broad

cartridge belt with two heavy-caliber Colt revolvers swinging from it. The cook, upon the verge of stifling and mindful of keeping the best job he had ever had, went hurriedly outside for a bucket of water.

"Are they all right?" queried Mr. Sherrod, his gaze as full of anxiety as a child's as he laid one article after the other upon the table.

"They're sure all right!" answered Hard Ross.

"And—I haven't forgotten anything, have I?" even more anxiously.

"Good Lord, no!" burst fervently from Hard Ross. "You haven't missed a bet."

Mr. Sherrod's sigh bespoke a vast satisfaction. He smiled upon his foreman with returning amiability.

"I say, Ross," he said eagerly. "I don't doubt that we're going to forget all about our little misunderstanding this morning, aren't we? I dare say we're going to be real friends when we get to understand each other. Now, I've come out here to go to work with my sleeves rolled up, to speak figuratively. I haven't brought any foolish notions along with me. I'm willing to forget the difference in our stations and consider that we're just men and equals on the job. That's fair, now isn't it?"

"That's fair," returned Ross, his head down now, his big fingers very busy with his cigaret building.

"I'm going to show you that I mean business." Mr. Sherrod was divesting himself of his outer clothing as he spoke, and began to don hastily the gay regalia of the Behind-the-Footlights-Cowboy costume. "I'm going out to ride over the ranch with you this morning." He jerked on his snow-white chaps, and buckled his belt about his waist, a heavy revolver swinging in its new holster at each hip. "The first thing will be a horse. Say, Ross, is there an extra saddle-animal on the ranch that—er—that is full of life and all that and yet that—er—that a man can trust? That won't go to bucking, you know?"

Hard Ross's first thought had been the temptation to give this man the worst horse of the outfit. Now he felt ashamed of himself.

"The pore devil's tryin' to be a man, anyhow," he told himself thoughtfully. "He's tryin' to be fair." And he decided to pick out one of the older, more quiet horses for his new boss.

"There's just one more thing and we can go to work." Mr. Sherrod paused, saw

that the cook had gone down to an outhouse for something, and went on swiftly, "I guess I did make a mistake this morning, Ross. I want you to forget it. Will you—do you ever drink anything?"

"I ain't ever missed the chance," grinned Ross. "Not since I was ten."

"Just after breakfast—you don't mind that?"

"There's jus' three times a man ought to drink lickin'," Ross informed him gravely. "One is before meals, one is durin' meals an' the other is between meals. Don't wait on me."

Mr. Sherrod laughed, seemed again upon the verge of giving an order, thought better of it and went back to the automobile. He brought forth a large suit-case this time, lugged it into the bunk-house, closed the door, and opened the suit-case.

From the suit-case came a bottle and there was scarcely a flicker of surprise in Hard Ross's steady eyes when he saw that the thing he was called upon to drink to forgetfulness of an insult and to a better understanding, was champagne. The bottle popped and they drank from two thick earthen coffee cups. And when they had done Hard Ross, a little apologetically, asked:

"You haven't got any whisky along, have you? Jus' to wash the taste out with?"

Then they had whisky together. And then, side by side they went down to the corral, Mr. Sherrod in glittering new spurs, boots, chaps and nose-glasses. When the proper horses were lassoed by the unerring rope of Ross, a gentle old mare for the new owner, a wild, untamed brute of a four-year-old for the foreman, they rode away together across the rolling floor of the valley. And when, an hour later, they met a couple of the boys cutting out a herd of calves at the north corrals, Hard Ross, being a gentleman in the uncouth heart of him, looked straight and steadily ahead and gave no sign of having seen the drooping eyelids and keen delight upon the faces which greeted the spectacular appearance of Mr. Sherrod, owner of the Up and Down cattle outfit.

IV



TO A man of inquiring mind there should be no more interesting study than the mysterious radiation of news from any given point in the cattle country to a thousand little nooks and

corners where telegraphs and telephones and daily newspapers are unknown. It is as if it were borne upon the chance wind, carried with the flood of a gossiping creek, sung across the wide spaces by the whispering tongues of pine-needles, dropped here and yonder like rain from the bursting bosoms of scudding clouds.

Within two days from the time of the coming of the new owner to the Up and Down, word of the event had gone its thirty-mile way to White Rock and from that bustling outpost upon the skirts of the civilized had run its many ways over the lower valley country. Within five days White Rock had distorted, magnified and transmitted to the utmost of its wonderful ability.

Within ten days it is to be doubted if there was a man, woman or child anywhere within a radius of fifty miles who had not heard of the theft of Silver Slippers, the punishment meted out to Hawley, the coming of Sherrod and his reception by his foreman. The delicate morsel upon the tongue of gossip was the characterization of Sherrod himself, and gossip went womanfully to her task.

And, after the news went up and down in many directions and to great distances, it traveled across the South Ridge upon the border of the Up and Down and dropped down into the corrals of Bull Plummer, foreman and owner of The Bar Diamond. And Bull Plummer, being a man of resource and initiative, got busy.

Mr. Sherrod had been with his outfit for two weeks, during which time he had had many adventures and had not fallen over the edge of a cliff, got himself drowned in the lakes or had his head kicked off by a vicious horse in the corrals. He had fired one of his heavy revolvers at a coyote to the boundless glee of the two men who happened to be with him, Sunny Harper and a man they called "Mute" Adams. Adams had ducked his head, Sunny Harper had lost no time in reining his horse around until he was close up to Mr. Sherrod's horse's tail, and the coyote having watched with an interest no less than the cowboys' and having cocked his knowing eye at the bark chipped from a cedar some twenty or thirty feet above his head, moved on into the chaparral.

"I—I'm afraid I'm out of practise," sighed the marksman, returning his revolver

to its holster and wiping his glasses with the tip end of his gay neck-scarf. "I'll have to put in a little time practising at a target."

And it was that evening, when the sun was just resting a broad golden disc upon the cliffs at the Lower End and while Mr. Sherrod was devoting himself patiently and painstakingly to the drilling of little holes in the atmosphere at a respectful distance from the ace of spades tacked to a young pine-tree that Bull Plummer rode up to the bunk-house.

It was too early for the men to have come in from work. Only the owner, Sunny Harper and Cookie busy at his stove were in camp.

Sunny Harper, very joyous over the spectacle of the target-shooting and the cold which he was doctoring manfully with an ample donation of whisky from the bottle which Mr. Sherrod had "saved out," saw Bull Plummer's big squat form rise up above a knoll, stared, rubbed his eyes, regarded his bottle accusingly and refused stubbornly to believe that he saw what he did see.

"If it was jus' Santy Claus comin'," he murmured gently, "or a boy in brass buttons with a pitcher lemonade, or a couple elephants, I might believe it. But Bull Plummer—on this range! Shucks. This must be awful powerful lick."

Sharply he cried out to Sherrod:

"It's Bull Plummer! Now what in blue blazes do you reckon he's lookin' for?"

Sherrod did not seem to have seen or heard so intent was he upon his revolver practise. Then a thing happened which made Sunny Harper choke upon his whisky and to gag upon one's liquor was, in Mr. Harper's way of thinking, "a terrible unsportsmanlike proceedin'." Sherrod, having missed his mark about three feet, squinted his eyes, set his teeth and took long aim.

Harper, watching him saw that Sherrod moved half a dozen quick steps to the right; surmised that still Sherrod was unaware of the approaching horseman; noted furthermore that Sherrod's swift change of base brought the wavering muzzle of his big revolver to bear in the general direction of the man from the Bar Diamond.

"Hey there, Mr. Sherrod!" yelled the suddenly galvanized Sunny Harper, his mellowed soul in no mood to witness an accidental manslaughter, even though the victim be Plummer. "There comes Plummer! Look out, or—Gawd!"

He sat back weakly and shivered a little. Had Sherrod been blind or deaf? Had he not understood or had he not cared? The revolver in his hand spat flame and its leaden missile, missing the tree more widely than its predecessors, sped on toward the man on horseback.

Yes; Sunny Harper gasped and choked and did not know that he did so. For he had seen an amazing thing. Sherrod's bullet had not missed Plummer's head three inches; it had torn a great, vicious hole in the peaked crown of Plummer's hat; it had carried the hat away and with it a lock of Plummer's black hair.

Plummer ducked wildly as a second bullet winged its way by his ear and announced his presence with a mighty shout, jerking his horse savagely back upon its haunches.

Sherrod, before he advanced toward the newcomer, turned for an instant to Harper.

"Plummer you said it was, didn't you?" he asked softly.

"It sure is," grunted Sunny. "An' it makes me seasick thinkin' what chances I've took watchin' you shoot!"

Then Sherrod went to meet Plummer. Not, however, until Sunny Harper had seen his eyelid, the left eyelid, flutter downward behind his glasses in an unquestionable wink!

"Do you suppose," the astounded Sunny Harper communed within himself, "that he—he winked! — it, I seen it! He shot a hole in Plummer's hat and he says to me, 'Plummer, ain't he?' An'—he winked!"

Slowly he lifted the bottle. Not to his lips but up so that his wide eyes might stare at it. Slowly he put it down beside him, shaking his head.

"I don't give a — if I am drunk," he affirmed. "Sherrod popped a hole in Plummer's hat and then—he winked!"

R AGAIN Plummer was coming on swiftly. He had reined his horse about, leaned outward and downward from the saddle had swept up his hat from the ground with an angry jerk, and now, his face red, his eyes roving restlessly about the bunk-house, came up to Sherrod. "What do you mean by this?" he snapped viciously.

"I say," laughed Sherrod, and the men who heard must guess as to whether the laugh was one of amusement or of nervousness, "I came pretty near getting you that

shot, didn't I?"

"You sure did," growled Plummer scowling briefly at his hat. "If you're lookin' for trouble——"

"Mercy!" cried Sherrod, shoving his gun back into its holster. "Don't you see? My target there—I was practising up. You came up unexpectedly."

"You're Sherrod, I take it?" grunted Plummer.

"Yes. You wanted to see me?"

He wiped his forehead, polished his glasses and turned his eyes speculatively upon the Bar Diamond man. What they saw was a very heavy-set man upon a very beautiful horse.

The saddle-animal was a black, young, spirited, groomed like a race horse, legged like a greyhound. Sherrod's eyes swept the clean-cut lines of the horse admiringly and went curiously to Plummer. Here was a man larger than Hard Ross, thicker of neck, of arm, of thigh, of body. The bared throat was hairy, almost black with the tan of sun and air. The eyes were small and black, given unusual brilliance, beadlike, by the emotion which a moment ago had reddened his face; the mouth large, with heavy, slightly protruding under lip.

Plummer's eyes, in the mean time, had found out Sunny Harper where he sat cross-legged under a stunted oak, and had again come to rest upon Sherrod. Here they tarried, their gaze keen, intent, measuring.

"You see," said Sherrod pleasantly, "in shooting as in anything else practise makes perfect. I've come here to stay, and a man living in this corner of the world ought to be a good shot, oughtn't he?"

Plummer nodded briefly. Again, before answering in words, he found time for a keen scrutiny which missed nothing of the conspicuous revolvers, the chaps which had remained so amazingly white, or the untouched ace of spades in the center of a rudely scarred circle made by much flying lead, tacked to the tree. When he spoke it was a little contemptuously, as perhaps a cattleman could not have helped speaking, though he strove to make expression and voice alike pleasant.

"I'm Plummer, from the Bar Diamond," he explained. "Seein' as we're neighbors I thought I'd drop over an' say 'Howdy.'"

"I'm glad you've come," cried Sherrod heartily. "Get down, Mr. Plummer. You've met Mr. Harper?"

"Oh, yes," returned Plummer easily, slipping out of the saddle and tossing his horse's reins to the ground. "Hello, Sun."

Sunny's answer was a grunt which might have meant nothing or a very great deal. Plummer looked at him swiftly, shrugged his broad, sloping shoulders and once more gave his attention to Sherrod.

"Like I said," repeated Plummer, looking straight and deep into Sherrod's unwavering eyes, "seein' we're neighbors we ought to know each other."

"That's right," agreed Sherrod quickly. "I'm glad you came over."

"An' besides," went on Plummer in his slow, heavy drawl, "I wanted to talk business with you."

Sherrod's white fingers sought out a silver-chased cigaret case and Sherrod nodded.

"Business is dry work," he suggested mildly. "And you haven't had a drink yet. If Harper there doesn't need it all we'll have a little drink to commemorate the occasion."

Plummer made no objection. Sunny Harper looked at his bottle with lingering affection, at the visitor with unconcealed dislike and distrust and surrendered his cold medicine with exceedingly bad grace.

A very few minutes later Bull Plummer again spoke of business. A couple of cigarets had been smoked, the din of pans and pots from the cook's quarters told what that individual was about, the sun had slipped down behind the cliffs, and out in the valley some of the boys were riding swiftly toward rest and supper. Sherrod seemed to hesitate a moment, and suggested:

"Suppose we go into my tent, Mr. Plummer? The boys are coming in and I think we could talk better out there."

A quick smile on Plummer's heavy lips told that he understood that his host realized he would not be a welcome guest when Hard Ross and the others arrived. He shrugged his shoulders again and with no comment followed Sherrod to the little tent which the latter had helped with his own hands to pitch under a tree a hundred yards from the bunk-house.

Sunny, before the coming of the boys, had gotten to his feet and had walked to the well. He stumbled once and drew up frowning.

"I ain't drunk," he told himself severely. "I'm awful sober. If I keep my mouth shut Ross ain't even goin' to smell my

breath, he'll be that busy cogitatin' over Plummer's nex' move. But if I take him into my confidence, if I say to him, 'Ross, this new city boss of our'n jus' shot a hole in Plummer's hat—an' winked 'at me,' Ross is goin' to make a mistake an' say I'm drunk!"

Sunny went on, stumbled again, clapped his mouth tight shut and, when he drank from the well dipper, took his water between set teeth.

Just what passed that evening between the two men in the tent the boys in the bunk-house could not know. They knew that the owner of the Up and Down and the owner of the Bar Diamond talked long and evidently with considerable earnestness. That alone was enough to drive Hard Ross into a fury of anger. In his way of thinking Bull Plummer was several degrees lower in the scale than a coyote, a man who was crookeder than his reputation and that was saying a very great deal.

"Sherrod ought to know it, too," he snarled over the meal which he did not know that he was eating. "I've talked plain enough for a bonehead of a weak-eyed city guy to get wise. If he'd take a pot shot at the low-down cattle thief with one of them young cannon of his, even if he missed him a mile an' shot his own foot off, I'd think the better of him."

Sherrod himself had come into the bunk-house for something to eat for his guest and himself, had carried the plates and cups away saying apologetically that they were very busy and could talk better out there alone.

And as they talked Bull Plummer's heavy voice grew always lower so that no chance word was blown upon the evening breeze to the bunk-house door where the men went for their smokes. Steadily, as Plummer's tones sank Sherrod's rose. Now and then a little gurgle of laughter came from him and Sunny Harper thought begrudgingly of his cold medicine.

"The four-eyed fool's gettin' drunk," he muttered disgustedly. "When you can measure a man by what little was left in that quart bottle he ain't a man as you'd speak of with pride."

"Plummer ain't above stealin' his stick-pin with the sparkler in it," growled Hard Ross. "An' I hope he does. *Sh!* What's that?"

No one answered as they all listened, for

answer was all superfluous. From the tent came the unmistakable click, click, click of poker chips being dropped into stack by toying fingers.

Swiftly the darkness came on. There was a coal-oil lantern on the little table which Sherrod had placed by his bedside, and upon the tent walls were the silhouettes of the men whose business had gone the old way through the neck of a whisky bottle to a deck of cards. The table was between them now, Bull Plummer, sitting in the one chair, showed monstrously large against the white canvas, Sherrod on the edge of the bed again and again lifting a thick cup to his lips.

"Gettin' drunk an' playin' Bull Plummer," grunted Little John. "One guess to figger out what's goin' to happen."

"Same as a two-weeks-ol' calf playin' tag with a mountain wolf," offered a man whom they called "Needles" and who was not much more conversationally given than "Mute."

The click of the poker chips continued. Before long the musical chink of gold and silver added its account of what was happening. It grew late and the game went on. "Happy Day" Tennant yawned, stretched his short arms as far as was physically possible above his round body and went to bed. One by one the others followed him.

Still the game went on and Hard Ross alone sat on the doorstep, a cigaret dead between his lips, his eyes frowning and bent steadily upon the shadow shapes.

The stars floated out into a dark heaven absolutely cloudless, the little wind died down, the moon at the full paused a moment over the steep cliffs standing like Titan piled walls at the Upper End then moved its golden way through the golden stars, and still the game went on and Hard Ross watched and waited. He didn't see the stars and he hadn't noticed the moon. His thoughts were full of Bull Plummer and Sherrod, of Hawley and a mare named Silver Slippers.

"Bull Plummer knows jus' where Silver Slippers is right now," muttered Hard Ross heavily. "He knows where more'n one long-horn wearin' a U an' D in its hide has gone the las' year. He knows I know it. An' he's got the nerve to show up here, right under my nose! He'd ought to know it ain't real safe to monkey aroun' on the

Up an' Down while I'm on the job an' while the rest of the boys is feelin' strong enough to walk. Now, what's his play? What did he come for? Huh?"

The play was made; what did it mean? Bull Plummer had come to the range and he had said that it was just to get acquainted with his new neighbor. That made Hard Ross want to laugh. Plummer wasn't in the habit of riding ten miles of hard trail just to pay a social call.

Ross made one cigaret after another and sat still staring at the colossal shadow of the man he distrusted. The hours slipped by, the click of chips and jingle of coins continued. It was on the edge of midnight when the big shadow straightened up and Sherrod threw back the flap of the tent.

Ross, in the shadows of the bunk house, did not move. He pinched out the fire of his cigaret and watched the two men as they moved away toward the horse which Plummer had left to wait for him during the hours of his stay without grain or water. He saw that Plummer walked swiftly, steadily, turning his head this way and that like a man suspicious of danger. He saw that Sherrod lurched a little, that once he laid his hand on his companion's arm, and guessed what he had guessed before, that Sherrod had drunk most of the whisky.

He heard a brief conversation end as Plummer swung up into the saddle, heard Sherrod agree to ride over to the Bar Diamond for another game, and with tight-set lips watched the big man ride away through the shadows of the moonlit night.

Sherrod, still swaying a little, turned from Plummer and walked unsteadily toward the tent. Hard Ross, springing to his feet, went with long strides to the new owner's side.

"He skinned you nice an' plenty, I reckon," snorted the foreman. "Huh?"

Sherrod's amiable smile showed weak in the wan light.

"Come on inside the tent, Ross, that's a good fellow," came the answer as unsteady as the man's walk. "Want to tell you about it."

Ross followed as Sherrod led a devious way. Within the tent Sherrod threw himself upon the bed, murmuring,

"He's a fine fellow, Plummer. Great fellow."

"That's all right," cut in Ross sharply.

"You can't tell me much about him I don't know already." His stern eyes ran quickly from table littered with cards and chips to overturned chair and empty bottle. "Tell me what happened."

"Great chappie, Plummer," Sherrod wandered on absently. "Plays fine hand of cards. And I know, Ross, I'm no baby when it comes to the good old game, you know. I'm going over to his home; we're going to play some more. Better come along, Ross, old chap."

"Tell me what happened!" snapped Ross, losing patience. "How much did he skin you out of?"

"Oh!" laughed Sherrod unevenly. "How much did he skin me out of? Why, let me see."

He sat up, adjusted the nose-glasses which had slipped awry, and ran his fingers into his vest pockets. Then he stood on his feet and put his hands into his trousers pockets, swaying dangerously. The smile gradually broadened on his face.

"Say, Ross, don't tell the boys," he chuckled. "He played the greatest run of luck you ever saw. He's the luckiest man dealing I ever saw. On my deals it wasn't so bad. Yes, sir." His laugh made Ross's hands clench. "Every time he'd deal me a hand I thought my luck had changed, the hand was so good. And then his would be better and he'd win! Talk about a man's lucky night!"

"How much did he win?" thundered Ross.

"Why," hazarded Sherrod, smiling. "About five hundred, I'd say. He —"

But Hard Ross had swept back the tent flap and was running toward the stable.

"What's the matter?" called Sherrod after him. "Where are you going, Ross? What's the hurry? Let me tell you——"

"I'm goin' to get my horse an' go for a little ride," Ross's angry voice boomed back at him. "An' you better go to bed an' put your clothes under your pillow, so some jasper don't come an' skin you out'n them."

V

 SHERROD awoke with a start. It was very dark in his tent and his imagination must help his frowning eyes to make out the form moving in the little enclosure. Then there was the spurt of a match, its quick flare and before the

lantern was lighted he knew that it was Hard Ross returned from his ride.

He lay still, saying nothing, his eyes waiting for a view of the foreman's face. When at last the features grew separate from the thick darkness Sherrod saw that Hard Ross's lips were tightly compressed, that his eyes were stern and wrathful.

"I must say," began the man on the bed, sitting up against his pillows, "you've got rather strange nocturnal habits, my dear fellow. To go for a ride at midnight, for one thing; to come in here and wake me up, for another."

"An' it strikes me I ain't the only man on this range," retorted Ross sharply, "who's got the habit of doin' almighty funny things."

He ran a big hand across his forehead and came closer to Sherrod's bed, towering over him.

"Here's your money," he said bluntly. He drew from his pocket a handful of gold and silver and dropped it upon the little table. "You might count it to see if I lost any."

"What!" cried Sherrod incredulously. He was sitting up very straight now and his eyes had widened perceptibly. "You mean that that is why you rode after Plummer? You held him up!"

"I stuck him up jus' as pretty as if I'd been highwayman for ten years," shortly. "An' now I'm goin' to bed. But firs' I'm goin' to tell you something, Mr. Sherrod."

"Go ahead," returned Sherrod, watching him wonderingly and making no move to count the confusion of coins. "To say that I'm curious would be drawing it rather mild, Ross."

"It's jus' this: I ain't ever saw a growed-up man that was a greener tenderfoot than you in all my days an' I don't expect to live long enough to see your beat. But that ain't worryin' me. That's your funeral. If you want to let a crook come an' skin you out'n your pile on a string of raw deals——"

"You don't mean to insinuate," cut in Sherrod, "that Plummer wasn't playing fair? That he cheated."

"No," dryly. "I ain't got a word like insinuate in my head where my tongue reaches for it. I'm jus' sayin' he's as high up in the order of thiev'in' crooks as you are in the club of fool tenderfeet. All the same, not carin' whether you buy aigs with

your money an' let a yeller dog suck the aigs, I goes out an' makes Mr. Bull Plummer look into the open en' of a little forty-four an' brings back your counters to you. An' I don't want to be misunderstood none. I want you to know why I done a play like that!"

"I'm certainly very anxious to know," remarked Sherrod stiffly.

He sought for his nose-glasses, found them, stuck them upon his nose and directed a keen glance through them upon his foreman.

"An' I'm tellin' you, ain't I? We been losin' considerable stock from the Up an' Down off an' on for quite a spell. That stock ain't been climbin' over the cliffs lookin' for eagles' nests, an' they ain't been divin' into the lakes lookin' for trouts. They've been stole, stole from right under my nose. On top of that a couple of weeks ago Silver Slippers, the fines' little mare you ever seen, gets stole out'n the barn right down there. Now, I ain't a mind-reader maybe, but I ain't quite exactly what you'd call a blind man, neither. I know the crook as is back of the whole deal. An' do I look like a man as is goin' to let that same crook come right square into camp an' stick the owner of the Up an' Down for five hundred bucks an' then get away with it, laughin' at me all the time!" Ross's big fists were doubled, his eyes threatening. "He didn't laugh none when I overtook him on the trail an' had my little talk with him!"

"But, man alive," cried Sherrod. "You don't mean that you suspect Plummer of being a cattle thief? Why, he's a rancher like me; he told me tonight that he's been losing stock too. He even suggested that we get together and formulate some scheme of apprehending the 'rustler.' Why, Ross, that is the business he came over on!"

"An' you swallered that?" demanded Ross in mingled wonder and contempt.

"Let me tell you something, my friend," said Sherrod impatiently. "As soon as it is morning I'm going to ride over to the Bar Diamond. I am going to take this money back to Mr. Plummer, and I'm going to apologize to him for your conduct of tonight. And then——"

"It don't make no manner of difference to me what you do," cut in Ross angrily. "An' it don't make no difference to me what Plummer does, jus' so he keeps off

this range as long's I'm foreman here, an' jus' so he don't take nothin' off'n the range as don't belong to him."

"But, look here, Ross——"

"I'm goin' to bed," Ross snapped back at him. And Ross went to bed.

When he had gone Mr. Sherrod lay very still for a long time, his eyes full of speculation as they rested upon the money on the table. Then he took off his glasses, put them by the money, put out his light, and lay back, laughing softly as though at a rare jest.

"I'd like to know just what was said on the trail," he chuckled. "Good old Ross!" And then he went to sleep.



IN THE morning the expected happened when Sherrod complained of a headache and besought Cookie, at a late hour, to bring him a cup of coffee, very black. Cookie grinned and brought the coffee. His eyes flew wide open at the sight of the money scattered upon the table.

Sherrod groaned, found his nose-glasses which with trembling fingers he stuck upon his nose, saw the money through them and in return for Cookie's kindness invited him to help himself to a dollar or so. Cookie made it four dollars and went his way back to the bunk-house whistling and meditating a little trip to White Rock.

The boys had gone about the day's work. Half an hour after the coffee had been drunk Sherrod came into the bunk-house. He made a rather good meal then, and smoked a cigaret. And then he prepared for his ride, for the returning of a call and five hundred dollars poker money.

He shaved and spent much time removing a spot from his white chaps. He brought to light a new silk shirt, this one a bright red, and a very beautiful white silk neckkerchief to go with it. Then, his money in his pocket, his two revolvers bumping grandly against his hips, his spurs twinkling in the morning sunlight, he went down to the corral, cornered his horse and caught him with coaxing words and a wisp of hay, saddled and rode away toward the Upper End.

It was a wonderful morning and Sherrod, as he rode his gentle horse through the valley, sang little snatches of song and looked about him with brightening glances. He had before him some five miles before

he came to the Upper End where the steep cliffs closed in about the Twin Lakes, another five miles or so to ride through the pass, over the south ridge and to the Bar Diamond headquarters. Now his trail followed the willow-fringed creek which after slipping through its rock-bound gorges where it leaped from its source in the Twin Lakes ran its merry race westward to water the meadows of the Up and Down.

Upon leaving the Up and Down bunkhouse behind him Sherrod rode into what the boys called Big Tree Meadow. Here the valley widened abruptly, here the floor was level and studded with great venerable cedars and sugar pines their outflung branches tossed so high against the sky that a man under them lost sight of the rock walls of the valley two or three miles away from him on right and left. Half an hour's leisurely progress through Big Tree Meadow brought horse and rider to the Narrows where again the cliffs drew closer in on each hand until little more than a mile separated them.

Through the Narrows Sherrod rode on, touching his ambling horse with the spur and breaking into a gallop. He noticed how the cliffs, rising almost perpendicularly along the boundary-lines of the range, were impossible of crossing for cattle and horses.

"Lots of fence was saved when this valley was made," he meditated.

Now the mountain barriers marched almost in parallel lines until he had ridden into the Gap. Here the cliffs were not five hundred yards apart on each side, and through them, rushing downward from a rocky shelf, the creek made its leaping descent in the white froth of waterfalls. Here the trail became suddenly steep and difficult, winding back and forth along the rising precipices, at times so narrow that the rider's leg scraped against the rocks, and a twig let fall from his right hand dropped straight a hundred feet into the whirlpools.

Again a sudden opening, a level, tree-studded plateau, and then all unheralded, the bright beauty of Twin Lakes. One of them half a mile long, the other a very little less, the overflow of one making its twin as the surplus waters of the second made the creek, fringed with monster pines and cedars mirrored in the placid surfaces, the homes of big trout, the watering-places

of the wild from the uplands, the two lakes lay before their new owner like great, glorious jewels in a setting of emerald. For everywhere, hanging down from the cliffs rising straight into air half a thousand feet about the still water, masking the rugged harshness of the towering boulders, at the foot of pine and cedar was a screen of vine, a mat of moss. And in the little recesses which time and weather had carved into the rock walls and whence many a little spring trickled, the bracken stood thick and tall, lush-stemmed flowers lifted their yellow and their red heads.

It was a fairy nook, and this morning under the warm blue sky should have been peopled with fairies. Sherrod reined in his horse and sat very still in the saddle looking upon this corner of his possessions admiringly.

"It's worth all that the range cost me," he said under his breath. Which went to indicate that perhaps Sherrod was not altogether a fool and a blind man.

He rode on upon a narrow, grass-grown trail, and once more drew rein to look, this time upon a little rocky knoll. Now he looked down upon the lake whose shores he had skirted, down upon the other lakelet lying just before him. He listened to the murmur of waters as it blended with the droning murmur of tree-tops and found music in it.

For close to a quarter of an hour he sat very still. His eyes, keen and frowning, traveled back and forth along the base of the cliffs, seeming to be seeking something. This was the first time he had come to this end of his holdings and perhaps he sought the trail which led from here through a pass and into the Bar Diamond country.

But his eyes were still frowning, still seeking when he at last touched his horse with the spur and rode on. His trail led him to the Upper Lake. He paused again looking at the tiny island which seemed to be afloat upon the middle of the water's quiet surface, an island which was but the upthrust crest of a submerged knoll, tree crowned and not measuring fifty paces from edge to edge.

From the miniature isle it was the logical thing for his eyes to wander across the upper lake to the far side and scale the beetling cliffs. And so he found something which surprised him since he had not expected to find it here.

It was a cabin builded of squared logs and set close in to the granite wall behind it so that the cliff really made the rear wall of the little dugout. For scarcely more than dugout was it, a poor enough shack covering a square of ground ten feet across from side to side.

"A camp for the boys when they have to spend a night up at this end," guessed Sherrod.

At first he saw no way to get to the cabin across the lake. It stood upon a rocky ledge, a bare space of some twenty yards intervening between it and the edge of the water. And then he saw that the trail led from where he was around the further shore and to the cabin door. And he saw, too, not a hundred yards from the cabin where the pass he sought led through a narrow cañon and to the Bar Diamond outfit. And he saw something else. And that something else so surprised the newcomer to this corner of the West that he gasped his astonishment.

It was between the mouth of the pass and the lone cabin. It was little over a couple of hundred of yards from him when first he saw it and he wondered why he had not seen it before. And then he understood.

Had the thing been in the heart of a city it would have loomed up with an individuality more marked and more distinctive than a record-breaking skyscraper. It would have been seen a mile away. And here, in the heart of the wild, he had almost stumbled upon it without seeing it. That was because it was builded so that it was a part of the wilderness, one with it, making no discord in the harmony of the landscape. Its pillars were the shaggy boles of giant trees, the rough bark and green moss still upon them. Its walls were of the same unplanned timbers or of the native granite boulders strewn the slopes. One corner column was a living cedar whose green boughs stirred gently in a breeze which did not drop down to the surface of the lake. One corner was a shoulder of the granite cliffs.

It did not look to be the work of man; it seemed rather some dryad home grown into being as the trees and the rocks themselves had grown. And in reality it was the abode of man, man made, large enough to shelter at one time all of the men who had ever come into the valley of the Twin Lakes.

"The man who dreamed that thing and

then put it into being," muttered the surprised Sherrod, "was an artist. And I have never heard of it! There should be woodland nymphs in a place like this; that is where their Lady Queen should have her throne-room."

To register a mental picture of the whole required but an instant when once it had stood apart in his vision from the forest and cliffs. To appreciate each little detail, to grasp the significance of each one, kept him motionless in the saddle, staring.

He saw where a window looked out through the branches of a gnarled cedar, vine-framed; saw where what appeared but a spire of rock was in fact a deep-throated chimney giving exit to a thin wisp of blue smoke; saw that what appeared a chance fallen log, lightning blasted, was a rustic foot-bridge spanning one of the many bickering streams which slipped down into the lake; and wondered as his eyes told him that the stream, stealing forth into the sunlight from between two big boulders, came from within the strange sylvan house.

The clear, laughing water flashing into the sunlight from some unseen source within the strange dwelling spoke to his fancy of a nature-made fountain in some spacious courtyard grass carpeted, fern-rimmed, starred with wild flowers. Now, more than ever, was there need for the queen of these solitudes. And there was within him a sense of deep satisfaction, of the utter, complete fitness of things, when his questing eyes found her.

VI



SHE had seen Sherrod before he had more than realized that she should be here to make the scene perfect. Without her this nook of the mountains was like some rare setting without its jewel; with her the vision was complete, exquisitely perfected.

Beside the stream upon which his admiring eyes had rested there was a great granite block, rudely squared, flat-topped. Two fir-trees grew close together upon one side of it, dropping their black shadows upon the level surface. And in their shade, not fifty yards from him, some ten feet above the surface of the stream, gracefully idle as she lay upon a great brown bearskin, watching him with amused eyes, was the maiden.

"Good morning," said Sherrod quietly, lifting his hat with a flourish as he spurred his horse close up to the granite block. "Good morning—provided that be the proper salutation."

"Why in doubt as to the time of the day, Sir Stranger?" she laughed back at him.

He saw that she was dressed very becomingly in something dove colored, although his man's eyes did not concern themselves with feminine details in the matter of the tying of a hair ribbon or the mode of a pattern. His man's eyes did concern themselves very particularly, however, with the white of her rounded throat, the brown of her hair through which the sun had scattered much shimmering gold, the bronzed, clear-skinned cheeks, the very red lips, stained with youth and curved to laughter, and with her eyes. He was near enough now to marvel at the soft gray of their coloring, to fancy that he could see the little golden flecks in them which were like tiny glints of sunlight.

"My doubt was merely concerning the form of address to be used when one meets the Queen of the Dryads," he returned soberly. "A 'good morning,' sounds so stupidly commonplace for such an occasion, you know. And, he who hesitates is lost. I was undecided whether I should go down upon my knees and cry, 'Forgive the impudence of mine eyes, O Spirit of the Woodland!' or whether I should seek flowers to strew before you, calling devoutly, 'All hail, Dawn Maiden!'"

"So then you know who I am?" was what she said, puzzling him. And as she read his perplexity in the eyes turned gravely upon her through the nose glasses, she laughed again and ended with mock severity, "I think you should have said, 'Forgive the impudence of mine eyes,' Mr. Sherrod."

"I know only what you seem to be," he returned, a little surprised that she called him Mr. Sherrod. "And you, I suppose your trees and streams and mountain breezes tell you the names of presumptuous mortals daring to invade your fastnesses?"

He swung down from his saddle, left his horse with dragging reins and stepped across the log bridge so that he stood on the rude rock steps leading up to her. He saw now that her feet were incased in little deer-skin moccasins decorated with Indian bead-work and that a book had slipped from her

hand and lay unheeded upon the bear rug.

"I hope that you will forgive my interruption of your solitude," he said when he stood half-way up the uneven ascent and his eyes were level with hers. "I am Sherrod of the Up and Down."

He paused a moment as if inviting a like confidence, and when all that he got was a sweeping glance, full of quiet laughter, which ran from his silken scarf nicely tied to the broad belt and the butt of a revolver just showing when she sat upright, he flushed a little and went on hurriedly:

"I'm the new owner of the range as perhaps you have heard? I've been here only a couple of weeks and until this morning never rode so far this way."

She nodded and made no answer. The laughter had gone from her lips and eyes and she was looking out across the lake now, musingly. Sherrod was not quite comfortable, not quite certain that she had not forgotten that he was on her side of the cliffs. He bit his lip, hesitated a little and then went on stubbornly:

"I had the idea that my land comprised all of the territory within this basin, that it extended quite across the lake and beyond the cliffs. You see, I bought the range on what I knew of it and without actually riding over it. I had never heard of the unique building which is, I take it, your home?"

He wasn't sure that she so much as nodded this time. He saw the curve of her cheek and it told him nothing. And still he continued.

"Evidently I was mistaken. Am I asking too much if I request that you tell me just where my boundary-line is? Am I trespassing on another man's property right now?"

Her head turned slowly, he saw her profile, then her eyes were turned searchingly upon him. For the moment that she did not reply he felt that she was trying to look down under the surface of him, seeking for something which might lie in his soul.

"No doubt it is a little confusing," she admitted quietly. "The Up and Down range does include the lake, Mr. Sherrod. Both of them. And your line does run to the top of the cliffs and, I think, something like half or three-quarters of a mile beyond. Still," with a faint hint of a smile which came and was gone so swiftly that Sherrod

was not sure that his eyes had not tricked him into thinking a beam of quivering sunlight dropping down through the branches was a smile, "I am very much afraid that you are trespassing. Just adjoining your range on the east there is a quarter section which belongs to us. Our hundred and sixty acres are mostly those cliffs yonder," nodding to the rocky fall of mountains back of them, at the extreme eastern end of the valley. "About two acres of our little place, however, are down here. We extend almost to your Upper Lake."

She went on in the same quiet matter-of-fact tone to indicate certain natural landmarks standing between the border of the Up and Down and by what she was pleased to term the "place belonging to us." So Sherrod saw that one end of the log bridge lay upon his property, the other end upon "ours," and understood that when he had passed over the middle of the stream he had begun to trespass.

He saw that the strange rambling dwelling which seemed so intimate a part of the wilderness was just beyond his line. Then his eyes went across the lake, understanding that the tiny tree-topped island was all his, and came to rest upon the sturdy cabin of squared logs which he had first seen.

"That is mine or yours?" he asked.

He knew that he didn't care whose it was; he fully realized that he wouldn't have given fifteen cents for it; but he had no mind yet to end his conversation with her.

"Yours, I suppose." She seemed to hesitate, and then as she went on a little flush crept into her cheeks. "Father had it built, I believe. Oh, long years ago before our real home had grown. People didn't think much of boundary-lines in those days, I've heard. And, even now, he uses it for a sort of storeroom."

"I say," cut in Sherrod hastily. "I don't care anything about boundary-lines, myself. That's all right. I just asked

"To keep the conversation going?" she suggested with another of her quick, elusive smiles.

"Well," he retorted bluntly, "why not? I did want to talk with you, to be neighborly—for we are neighbors, aren't we? And you didn't seem in the least eager to do your part."

"If my part is to talk with a young gen-

tleman I've never seen before and consequently could not, by the largest stretch of all that's reasonable, have the slightest interest in, no," she answered him as bluntly.

"But I've never seen you before, either, have I? And I'm interested in you."

She shrugged a very lovely pair of shoulders and her hand went to the book she had dropped before he came and had forgotten afterward.

"The proper thing to say, I suppose," she said coolly. "And now, Mr. Sherrod, if there are no more questions you wish to put to me—"

"But there are," he returned imperturbably. "Two questions more if you will be so kind as to answer them for me. The first is, can you tell me if that is the trail yonder—" he pointed to the pass which he had noted leading southward—"which leads to the Bar Diamond?"

He saw a quick flash of interest in the big gray eyes when he spoke the name of the Bar Diamond and he was wondering what should bring that light into them when it was as suddenly veiled by the sweep of her lashes.

"That is the trail," she answered, making no comment.

"And the other question," he continued quietly, "is, may I call sometime?"

"That," she said with pointed indifference, "is a matter which you had best take up with father, hadn't you? If you wish to be neighborly with him no doubt—"

"I should like to call on you," he told her as equably.

"You are very kind, Mr. Sherrod. And I should be delighted if—if calls weren't such a nuisance. Honestly, don't you think that they are? In town we put up with such things just as we eat and drink things which we don't like, merely to please a hostess who doesn't care a snap about it, and wear gowns which are fashionable when they look hideous and feel uncomfortable. Maybe you haven't lived out here in the wilderness long enough to realize that it isn't necessary to be polite. So, you see, there is no real reason why you should ask to call or why I should say I should be delighted."

She stood up, her finger lost in the leaves of her book and looked down upon his upturned face, her eyes mystifying him.

"Conventionalities are really very little,

insignificant things in the shadow of cliffs like those big old fellows," she ended the matter.

Or sought to end it. For there appeared to be a strain of stubbornness in Sherrod's makeup. He watched the graceful, slow movements of her supple young body as she came toward him, saw the moccasined foot seek the topmost of the rude steps and put out his own slender, white hand to her. She did not seem to notice it, her gown brushed against his chaps, and she passed down, neither hurriedly nor loiteringly.

"I must be going in," she said when she had passed him. "Good morning, Mr. Sherrod."

"You might at least tell me your name," he said a trifle irritably. "And you might let me know when I can call."

"Wouldn't it simplify matters if you didn't call? Then you wouldn't have any need of knowing my name."

"But I want to see you again."

"Very much, I suppose?" and he knew that there was a new note of laughter in her voice.

"Very, very much," he returned.

He too had come down the steps and stood looking after her, his eyes filled with an admiration which there was no need to hide since she had not turned toward him. But now she paused a moment and did turn, so swiftly that the admiration was still high in his eyes.

"If you want to see me very much," she said in mock seriousness, "you may come."

"It is very kind of you to let me call——"

"I didn't say *call*. I said once before that calls are stupid and all people who are not stupid themselves know it."

She bestowed upon him a long, sweeping, leisurely glance which might have been a trifle impertinent, and which took stock of his broad hat, his theatrical cowboy costume, ending with a little twitch of the lips when her eyes rested upon the dainty black boots, the remarkably high heels, the amazingly ornate silver spurs.

"If you want to see me very much you can prove it."

Sherrod adjusted his nose-glasses with precision and returned her cool glance coolly.

"But give me the opportunity, Dawn Maiden," he said soberly.

A quick frown came into her eyes.

"Why do you call me that?" she demanded a bit stiffly.

Sherrod laughed.

"For two reasons; I always have two reasons, you know. First, you will remember that although I asked for your name you refused it. Second, you look like that."

"And you really don't know what my name is?"

"No. But you were going to tell me how I could prove to you that I want very much to see you again?"

"Yes. I have been thinking all day that I'd like to see the sun come up in the morning from Daybreak Spire. I shall be there just before the sun rises; I shall leave then and hurry back for breakfast. You may come to see me there. And if you do," and the laughter was all unsuppressed now, "I'll bring you back to have breakfast with me, Mr. Sherrod!"

"But where is Daybreak Spire?" he called to her. For she had turned again and was moving away from him.

"I am not answering any more questions today, kind sir," she retorted. "Good morning."

"Then, I'll find out," Sherrod cried to her. And when she did not seem to have heard he called louder, "If I needed proof this proves that you are the Dawn Maiden!"

He watched her move upward along the stream's course, saw her pass upon its brink between the two big boulders which formed a strange portal to the strange house. Then she disappeared without once turning. And Sherrod swung up to his horse's back and rode on through the shadows of the great trees to the mouth of the pass leading over the cliffs to the Bar Diamond.

And from between the boles of two giant cedars standing at the side of the big boulders a pair of very merry gray eyes watched him until the spotlessly white chaps and brilliantly red silk shirt and twinkling spurs had passed out of sight.

"I wonder what he is up to?" murmured the Dawn Maiden, her book lying forgotten where she had tossed it upon a pile of cushions. "You may be a very great fool, Mr. Sherrod; I rather think you are a very clever young man. Anyway, your nose-glasses—Most of the time you look under them or over them—and not through them!"

Then a voice, a man's voice, called sharply to her. And answering, "Yes," a frown coming again into her eyes, she went to answer more questions and tell of her encounter with the new owner of the Up and Down.

VII

 SHERROD found his ride through the pass, over the ridge and down into the Bar Diamond country not without interest. The pass itself was a steep-walled, narrow, winding cañon, the cliffs rising so straight on each hand and so high that a man must throw back his head and gaze straight upward to see the blue of the sky; the ravine so narrow that time and time again he could hold out his arms and touch the granite cliffs upon each hand, and so crooked that more often than not a man could not see twenty feet ahead or behind.

And always the trail following the devious way of the pass was steep and sought the notch in the top of the cliff-wall. At times it was thick-strewn with crumbled fragments of the rocks above, at times where it widened out to form a little pocket some twenty or fifty feet across, it was floored with sandy soil which caught and held the tracks of the cow or the horse which had passed this way. Sherrod saw this morning no signs of cattle, but saw readily in the sand in one of these pockets where it was damp from a small spring in the mountain-side, the tracks which Bull Plummer's horse had left last night.

"The trail isn't traveled much, that's one thing," was Sherrod's sole comment to himself.

For the only other signs at all clear were two weeks old and were the tracks left by Hawley when he had ridden furiously to the Bar Diamond from the Up and Down and a bad beating.

It was an hour after leaving the shore of the Upper Lake before he left the up-climbing trail behind him and rode out through the "notch" and to the top of the cliffs. He drew his panting horse to a standstill, turned in the saddle to look back along the way he had come and a gasp of astonishment and admiration testified to the man's emotion. Below him, looking almost vertically down where he could drop a stone two thousand feet to its placid surface, was the lake. There were the falls, white in their spray, where the overflow of Upper Lake dropped down to make Lower Lake; there were those other falls where Lower Lake poured its water into the creek which went flashing its noisy way to the meadows of the Up and Down; there, half a dozen miles down the valley, were the bunk-house

and home corrals which he had left this morning, his own little tent showing brightly with its conspicuous white standing against the green of the scattering trees. And far, far to eastward were other glimpses of the valley and of the pine and fir clad mountains lifting their august heads into lofty grandeur above it.

His eyes brightened as they swept the far-reaching panorama and came again to the rocky summits upon which he had stopped. It was all the Up and Down—it was all his! And it was glorious, wonderfully perfect.

He was still upon Up and Down property; he would ride across the uplands for two miles yet before he came to the dividing line between the two ranges. The soil upon which he now rode was unfertile, unprofitable for the raising of cattle; hardly a twisted cedar could find root among the boulders and slabs of rock; only a few hard little wild flowers with tough, intrepid roots and small delicate blossoms grew here. And yet even these upstanding cliffs had their purpose; they belonged to him and they were his fences.

"And now," said Sherrod to himself or to his horse or to the vast stillness shutting down about him, "where is Daybreak Spire?"

Everywhere about him the cliffs reached up into flinty peaks, their summits clear cut against the sky reaching upward thousands of dizzy feet. Had there been only one peak it would have been a simple matter; but there were scores of lofty spires. Which one?

"It was to prove that I wanted very much to see her again," he mused. "And so it's the highest, hardest to climb. Aha! There you are!"

Turning slowly, letting his eyes range along the top of the mountains upon the far side of the valley, back of the spot where he had seen her, he picked out the one peak which he very promptly told himself should be Daybreak Spire. It would catch the first glint of the rising sun before its neighbors, for it stood alone, rising abruptly from a rocky plateau, and its crest soared upward what from here seemed like another hundred feet and what was many times a hundred. At the top it had the appearance of coming to a needle-point; allowing for distance, Sherrod decided that there would be quite enough room for a man and a woman to sit there comfortably.

Then he turned his horse southward again, across the barren table-land, and so came between ten and eleven o'clock to the fall of cliffs to the south from the top of which he might look down into the lands of the Bar Diamond as he had already gazed down into the Up and Down.

Here he saw a valley very much like the one from which he had ridden, a little broader, a little shorter. The lakes at the upper end were missing here, but a swift stream of water, taking its source in countless mountain springs, sped through the range and looked another Up and Down creek. And below him, in a wide meadow, a mile or so only from the head of the valley, were the Bar Diamond range buildings and corrals.

"A first-class outfit," thought Sherrod as he looked down upon the fertile meadows thick-stocked with browsing cattle and horses. "And all that belongs to Plummer. Hem!"

Then he gave his horse a touch of the spur, found the down-leading trail and stopped no more until he had come into the valley. Coming out of the mouth of the gorge where it opened into the Bar Diamond valley he came suddenly upon an old corral one side of which was a sheer wall of the cliffs, the other sides being roughly fashioned of logs and boulders.

At the base of the knoll upon which the corral stood were three men sitting their horses carelessly and watching the herd of cattle which, obviously, they had just driven from the valley further down to range in the cañons of the upper end. Sherrod saw that one of the men was his visitor of last night, and rode to meet him.

"Good morning," he called as the eyes of Plummer and of his two companions were directed upon him.

There was no immediate response to his greeting. As he came closer he could see that Plummer's sharp eyes were dark and wrathful, that a little red flush had run up into the bronzed cheeks and that the big right hand hanging at the man's side twitched nervously.

He saw, too, that the other men eyed him with open curiosity, and that they looked swiftly from him to each other and then to their foreman. And still none of them spoke.

Sherrod came on at a trot, his immaculately clad body jolting up and down as his horse carried him over the uneven ground, and drew rein close to Plummer.

"I don't know that I quite savvy your play," said the Bar Diamond man his eyes never for an instant leaving Sherrod's smiling ones.

"What do you mean?" queried Sherrod.

"I mean," returned Plummer bluntly, "that your right-hand man is a — crook an' that I've tol' him it's up to him to go for his gun an' go for it quick when we cross trails! So, I guess you an' me had better have things understood, too."

"That's what I came for," Sherrod assured him pleasantly. "I didn't want you to think that Ross acted on my orders last night when he rode after you and made you give the money back."

Again the two men with Bull Plummer exchanged quick glances, again their eyes came to rest curiously upon their chief's face. Plummer's expression had not changed, save that his eyes were a little darker, the flush in his cheeks a trifle ruddier.

"If he hadn't come up on me unexpected an' from behind an' throwed his gun on me before I was thinkin' about a crooked deal," muttered Plummer sharply, "he wouldn't have rode back at all."

"He didn't tell me how he did it," answered Sherrod. "I didn't want to know. If he takes it upon himself again to interfere in my affairs I'm going to let him go. My men have got to learn that just as you own and manage the Bar Diamond so do I own and manage the Up and Down. I rode over this morning, Mr. Plummer, to apologize for what has happened."

"Apologies don't buy much," snapped Plummer.

"And," went on Sherrod, "to return your money to you."

He drew from his pocket a heavy, bulging purse, poured a handful of glittering coins into his palm and extended it to the Bar Diamond man.

The three men looked at him first in plainly expressed amazement, then in a quiet contempt scarcely less plain. Plummer's big hand came out swiftly and in a flash the coins went into his own pocket.

"You're square, Sherrod," he said slowly. "You're a — square man. I'm glad to have you for a neighbor. Hawley," sharply to the heavy-set man at his elbow, "you an' Smith haze them cattle a little fu'ther up in the cañons. By then it'll be dinner an' after dinner we'll take a run down to the lower corrals."

Hawley and Smith, with no word, touched their horses with the spur and raced off across the narrow end of the valley. Their eyes were hidden swiftly but before they had gone fifty yards the laughter of one of the men floated back to Sherrod and Plummer. Plummer frowned, glanced at Sherrod, and then turned his own horse toward the Bar Diamond bunk-house.

"It's pretty near dinner-time, anyhow," he said carelessly. "We'll have time to unsaddle an' have a coupla drinks before the boys shows up."

"I'd like to," hesitated Sherrod. "And—you promised to give me a chance for my revenge, you know."

"Come on," cried Plummer. "I'm kinda busy today, but you been square, Sherrod! As soon's the boys go to work after dinner me an' you'll set in for a nice little game."

"I'd certainly like to," and again Sherrod's voice came hesitatingly. "But I have a very great deal to do and—you see, Plummer, I am actually taking control of the Up and Down, and the ins and outs of the work aren't as simple as a man would think, are they? I'd certainly like to play you again and for a good big stake. But—no, I'm afraid we'll have to let it wait a while."

"Well, you better come along an' have a drink anyhow. An' you'll want a bite to eat before you go back."

"I tell you what I'll do," Sherrod said at last. "I'll take a little ride with you down to your headquarters. I'd like to see how you have things arranged. And then really I must hurry back. Some other time, Plummer. Thanks just the same."

So side by side they rode down the valley the little way to the Bar Diamond bunk-house, Sherrod looking with great interest at the land, the out-buildings, the corrals, the arrangement of everything. And then, with a swift glance at his watch and a smile and a shake of the head at Plummer's repeated invitation to get down and have a drink, he said "so long," in the way of the range and rode back toward the Up and Down.

Before Sherrod was out of sight, Hawley had ridden a sweating horse into the barn and leaving the animal saddled hastened to the bunk-house.

"Well?" he demanded of Plummer.

Bull Plummer looked at him steadily a moment. And then his hard face growing harder, his keen eyes brighter, he said bluntly:

"Get the boys ready, Hawley. There ain't no use wastin' time at a chance like this. Get Tom an' Lofty down to the other end tonight. I ain't quite sure of them boys yet. An' we ain't goin' to take no chances."

"Hard Ross," began Hawley, only to be cut short by a snarled,

"He's due to take a trip right soon to a place they don't run cattle none!"

VIII



IT WAS late afternoon when Sherrod rode back to the Up and Down bunk-house. He found Hard Ross in the corrals saddling a fresh horse about whose rebellious neck an unerring lasso had just settled. Ross looked up at him sharply, grunted and went on jerking his latigo tight.

"It's nearly time to quit work, isn't it?" queried Sherrod, slipping awkwardly and stiffly from the saddle. "And you look as though you were just starting out."

"I am," came in a second, almost unintelligible grunt. "I got a big job an' a mighty pleasant job on my hands this trip!"

"Yes?" Sherrod was unsaddling but looked interested. "What is it?"

"It ain't range business," shortly. "It's jus' my affairs, same as it's your affairs where you been ridin' all day."

Sherrod laughed.

"I told you what I was going to do. I rode over to the Bar Diamond to return Mr. Plummer's money."

"Which was a worse fool trick than losin' it in the fir's place," snorted the disgusted foreman.

"I haven't asked your opinion, Ross," retorted Sherrod with dignity. He jerked off saddle and bridle, turned his horse loose in the corral and then, his voice pleasant again, asked, "By the way, where's Daybreak Spire, Ross?"

"Daybreak what?" Ross looked at him frowning. "I don't know. I've lived in this neck of the woods quite some time, pardner, an' I never heard of a man or a horse or a creek or an outfit called Daybreak anything."

"I rather supposed that most people wouldn't know it by that name," sighed Sherrod. "By the way, Ross, I saw a man named Hawley at the Bar Diamond today."

"You did, huh?" Ross made no other comment, although his eyes remained steady upon the nose-glasses.

"Yes. An unhandsome sort of chap. Say, what's the name of the people who live up by the Twin Lakes?"

"Madden," said Ross. He had finished with his cinch, jerked the stirrup down and swung up into the saddle.

"Who are they?"

"They're Madden, who some folks calls the Hermit an' some says is part crazy, an' his stepdaughter."

"What's her name, Ross?"

Again Ross looked at him sharply.

"Her name's Dawn." He noted Sherrod's start, and then, a quick smile playing for a moment upon the stern features. "That's pretty near the same thing as Day-break, ain't it?"

"Where do you expect to find Hawley?" was Sherrod's next question. "Going to ride all the way over to the Bar Diamond?"

"Who said I was looking for Hawley?"

"I did. It's just two weeks since I came to the Up and Down, and that means that it is just two weeks since you had trouble with Hawley."

"It wasn't trouble," snapped Ross.

"And you gave him two weeks to bring Silver Slippers back to you. What made you think he stole her, Ross?"

"It's gettin' late," was the noncommittal answer. "It'll be dark up at the other end when I get there. So long."

"Wait a minute. I'm going with you."

Hard Ross made no attempt to hide his astonishment.

"You goin' with me!" he gasped. "Well, I'll be ——!" And then, wonderingly, "What do you want to do that for?"

"Look here, Ross." Sherrod was polishing his nose-glasses with a deal of unnecessary energy. "You've been pretty decent to me this week. I didn't approve of what you did last night but I appreciate it just the same. Now you're riding into danger and I'm not going to let you go alone."

Hard Ross's big voice boomed out in a roar of hearty laughter. He wiped his eyes and finally gasped,

"You're goin' along to keep me from gettin' hurt, huh? Oh, Lord!"

"And besides," went on Sherrod hastily, "I was going that way anyhow. I just rode in to get something to eat, to take something along for a bed, and to get a fresh horse. I'm going to climb to the top of the cliffs before sunup."

"What for?"

"Why," smilingly, "let's say for the view! And to get a good appetite for breakfast. Now, rope me a horse, Ross, there's a good fellow. I'll have something to eat while you're getting him. I won't keep you a second."

He gave his order as if he had no doubt about its being obeyed and hurried off to the bunk-house. Ross watched him a moment, then loosening his coiled rope from his saddle strings, rode into the second corral, caught a tall roan that Sherrod had ridden once or twice, and tied it to a post. And then he turned his own horse out toward the upper end and "rode on his spurs" to get away from the man who wanted to protect him.

Ross soon left the main trail, and once that he was riding where he felt Sherrod would not find him he drew his horse down to a swift walk. He was looking for trouble tonight, he was riding straight into it with both eyes wide open, and he was too old a hand at a hard game to spend his horse's strength and speed before time came for it. A fresh horse might mean a very great deal before the night was over.

A fresh horse might mean a live man in the morning or a dead man tonight. Hard Ross, riding slowly through the ever thickening dusk under the trees, drew his hat low over his eyes and shifted something from his hip pocket to the waistband of his trousers.

Then he made a cigarette, dropped the reins upon a well-trained cow pony's neck and rode on thoughtfully. And Sherrod did not enter those thoughts.

"It's two weeks today," he said to himself with the first deeply inhaled draw at his cigarette. "Hawley'll be rememberin' that. He'll know I wasn't jokin' when I gave him jus' two weeks to being Silver Slippers back. I'd have thought he'd have sense enough to do it. He'll be lookin' for me."



HERE in these steep-walled cañons darkness came swift upon the heels of the sunset. Before Hard Ross had come to the steep climb from the floor of the valley to the level of the Lower Lake it was pitch black about him, his trail lost to the eyes in the inky emptiness beneath him. And when he made the ascent he did it warily.

It was quite within the bounds of possibility that Hawley had decided to save him

the long ride to the Bar Diamond; Hawley might have ridden to meet him, might be waiting for him at any turn of the narrow trail. And Hard Ross of a great mind to kill Hawley and of little mind to have Hawley kill him, slipped silently from the saddle and holding an end of his horse's tie rope let the animal go on up the steep way ahead of him. And so he came to the top and it was very still and very dark about him and there was no sign that another man was within miles of him.

"A man that'll steal stock is a sneak," meditated Hard Ross when once more he sat still in the saddle before moving on again. "He's bound to be. An' it's a sneak's way to hide behind a tree an' shoot you out'n the dark. You ain't far off, Hawley."

Again he rode on cautiously, slowly, turning out of the well-beaten way many a time to ride upon a grassy bit of ground where his horse's shod hoofs struck no chance spark and fell silently. So he passed the first lake, came abreast of the second and saw the black mouth of the pass opening before him. And then, for the first time, he heard a sound which was not a part of the harmony of the night noises of the wilderness.

Instinctively, before even trying to catalogue the sound, he jerked his horse to a standstill and slipped from the saddle, his hand going to the revolver in his waistband. The noise came from just there, a little to the left, a little in front of him. It was just such a place as Hawley would choose.

Some one was walking toward him, the soft footfall cracking the dry twigs which lay in the grass. He waited, his stern eyes boring into the wall of the darkness. He saw a spurt of flame and the gun came leaping out of his belt, ready. But the flame was only a match.

The match went its short journey to the ground, for a moment was lost to him, and then the larger, brighter flame of a leaping bonfire licked at the darkness, its sharp tongue grew into many as the fire ran through a pile of dry brushwood and gnawed at the rotten log thrown across it, and Hard Ross saw that the sudden, bright light made the mouth of the pass as clear as day. And he saw too, and frowned at seeing, that the one who had lighted the fire and who now stood back a pace from it, was Dawn Madden.

"What's she doin' that for?" came his quick, questioning thought.

He had been certain it was Hawley; now it was clear that it was the girl. And why had she set a fire here where its blaze made the mouth of the pass so bright that a man riding through it would be a target hard to miss for any other man who might be waiting for him?

"Madden made her do it!" was Ross's quick decision. "An' Bull Plummer made him do it! An' if I go on an' ride on through there's goin' to be powder burnt inside two minutes! They're a nest of thieves an' they're stickin' almighty close together this play."

He waited a moment, listening, watching, undecided as to the thing to be done. If he rode on there was no way open save the pass; and if he rode into the pass . . .

He shrugged his broad shoulders and swung back up into the saddle. He had come this far and he was not going back. He had made Hawley a promise and he was going to keep it. He gathered up his reins tight in his left hand, his right whipped out the revolver which he was so certain now of using in a moment, his spurs were drawn back a little to send his horse racing through the circle of light.

Then again a sound broke upon his straining ears and he hesitated. As he understood a sudden fierce anger leaped into his heart and he drove his spurs home. This was the sound of a horse's hoofs behind him. It was the heralding of the approach of Sherrod who was coming to protect him.

Hard Ross heard the girl cry out in sharp surprise as he shot by her and toward the mouth of the pass, he heard a voice calling from just there behind him, Sherrod's voice, and he saw everywhere about him a black wall of darkness rimming him in.

He was almost at the mouth of the pass now. He was leaning low over his horse's neck and riding on his spurs, when he saw a quick spurt of red fire from the shadows in front of him, heard the snarling crack of a revolver and knew that Hawley was there, waiting for him. The bullet whizzed by him and sang its way through the night; he heard the pound of running hoofs behind him; he heard the girl cry out again; he saw the angry spit of fire again, not twenty paces from him, and still riding furiously he threw up his gun and fired back.

"Stay with him, Ross! I'm coming!"

It was Sherrod's voice ringing clear and Ross cursed aloud as he fired again into the darkness. He was almost through the circle of light now, but that light was growing brighter each second, leaping higher, reaching farther as the running flames licked at the dry fuel. Almost across the widening circle. . . .

And then another spit of flame in front of him, not ten steps away now, and Hard Ross, seeking to fire back, felt his revolver slipping from a nerveless hand, felt a hot streak of pain through his shoulder like the pain of a burning sword-point driven deep into the shrinking flesh, and cursing at his weakness pitched forward and fell—fell, still in the widening circle of light, and lay trying to rise, trying to force his dimming eyes to penetrate that impenetrable wall of darkness.

"Stay with him, Ross, old man! I'm coming!"

Again it was Sherrod's voice and again Ross, weak and dizzy, cursed. If it were only Sunny Harper or Little John or Mute! If it were only any one of the boys who knew how to ride and how to shoot! If it were only any one but the biggest tenderfoot he'd ever seen!

Hard Ross felt another tearing pain in his side as he lay there, knew that Hawley had shot him again, and then he would not believe that he saw the things which he saw.

He saw Sherrod riding at a breakneck speed over the uneven ground, spurring on into the threatening circle of firelight. He saw Sherrod sitting very straight in the saddle and riding like a man who was as much at home on a horse as Hard Ross was. He saw that Sherrod's hands, both of them were at his sides, one holding the reins, the other hanging loosely.

"The fool!" he muttered. "He don't know."

He saw Sherrod race by him, stooping a little from the saddle as he swept past, then straightening again. His hands were still at his sides. A loud-voiced shout, a shout in Hawley's unmistakable voice, cried to him to stop. And still he rode on and as he rode he laughed. And Hard Ross had never heard a laugh like that from a man before.

Again there was the red spit of fire from the gun in Hawley's hand. And then Sherrod's hand was no longer hanging loose at his right side. It had leaped to his hip, it

had been flung upward; there had come the crack of his revolver before the echoes from Hawley's gun had died away. Sherrod had fired, had fired once only and had jammed the gun back into its holster, swinging about in the trail and coming to Hard Ross's side.

"You fool!" cried Ross weakly. "He'll shoot you."

But Sherrod had swung down from the saddle and was bending over Ross, his hands going quickly to the red stain which the firelight showed already upon the foreman's shirt.

"Not hurt bad are you?" he was asking anxiously.

"Good Gawd!" cried Ross, trying to sit up and then sinking back, the blood pouring like water across his breast. "We're in the light—he'll get you!"

"He won't get anybody, Ross," returned Sherrod coolly. "Didn't you see me shoot?"

"You shoot? An' you can't hit a tree."

"I never missed a man yet," came as coolly as before. "Now, be quiet. You're pretty badly shot up. And," with a quiet sternness which puzzled Ross as much as anything else had puzzled him, coming in a voice which he could not recognize as Sherrod's, "remember that I'm running this outfit and that you take orders from me!"

Hard Ross said nothing. He began to wonder if already his mind were wandering. He could be sure of nothing. He felt his big body gathered up gently, tenderly in a pair of arms which were like steel; he felt his big bulk being lifted by this tenderfoot as if he had weighed fifty pounds instead of close to two hundred; he knew that he was carried a dozen steps and laid down at the edge of the trail where the firelight shone plainly and where there was a carpet of thick, lush grass.

And, though he listened and craned his neck, he heard no sound of running hoofs in the pass, no sound of a man running, saw no other spit of a gun. He looked up into Sherrod's face, wondering. There he saw that Sherrod's nose-glasses were not in their accustomed place and that in the eyes there was a sternness, a determination which he found it hard to reconcile with the man he knew, the man he had knocked down on the first day he came to the Up and Down. And then, a sudden great suspicion breaking like light into his brain, making him for the second forget the raging fury of the pain in his tortured body, he gasped:

"Say! Who are you? What's your name?"

"Sherrod," sharply. "Now don't go to——"

"Not Jim Sherrod? Not from the Painted Rock country. Not——"

"It's nobody's business where I'm from is it?" said Sherrod quickly. "My name's Sherrod and I'm your boss. That's enough!"

But it wasn't enough for Hard Ross. He threw his hand behind him and forced his pain-racked body into a sitting posture, his eyes wide as they rested upon Sherrod's face. And finally he sank back with a little moan of mingled pain and wonder.

"You let me knock you down!" he muttered. "An' I didn't know how close I stood to dyin'. A —— sight closer'n I am right now. I saw that trick of the gun——an' Hawley ain't moved! You're Fancy Jim Sherrod, that's who you are. An' I thought you was a tenderfoot! Oh, ——!"

IX



FOR a moment the lithe, sinewy form of Sherrod bent over Hard Ross. Sherrod's voice, in a swift, stern whisper spoke but a few words, and Hard Ross, half fainting from shock and fast-running blood, nodded that he understood.

"I am playing this hand my way," was what Sherrod had said briefly. "Can you keep your mouth shut, Ross?"

Ross sank still a little lower, his shoulders back against the ground now, his head whirling, his mind groping in a sort of dark. Fancy Jim Sherrod! It was Fancy Jim Sherrod! Fancy Jim from the Painted Rock country. A man whom he had judged a tenderfoot, a man whose name had traveled as things travel across the range lands, until five hundred miles from the Painted Rock men knew of him, knew his way with a gun, knew that his draw was like lightning, that he had a way of firing one shot and jamming his revolver back into its holster before the smoke cleared! The man who, single-handed, had cleaned out the Luke Verilees gang with four shots fired, all Fancy Jim Sherrod's, and four men lying upon the floor of the dugout where he had come upon them red-handed. The man who was born to bucking horses and running steers and swishing ropes and who had come to the

Up and Down wearing a derby hat and nose-glasses and with a smudge of ink on his fingers!

Sherrod, busy over his foreman's wounds, seeking to see in the dancing firelight just where they were located, to judge what danger the mute red lips of the torn flesh were telling, striving to bandage and stop the rush of blood, heard Hard Ross muttering.

"You mustn't talk any more than you have to, Ross," he said gently. "Is it anything you've got to say?"

Ross nodded again. Fancy Jim Sherrod put his ear close down to the hot lips and heard the muttered words:

"Hawley ain't moved yet. He ain't goin' to move."

"No," returned Sherrod very quietly. "He isn't going to move, Ross."

"He must 'a' rode a horse, Sherrod. It'd be jus' like him. Will you go and see?"

"If it's Silver Slippers?" Sherrod drew the swiftly improvised bandages tight and got to his feet. "You're going to live through it all right, Ross. It'll take a lot of killing to put you down for good. I'll go and see if he rode Silver Slippers."

Then, for the first time, Jim Sherrod saw Dawn. She was standing just at the edge of the ever-growing circle of light, her hands gripping each other with trembling fingers her eyes wide with the horror of the thing which she had seen.

"You here?" he cried.

"Tell me," the shaking voice floated to him. "Is he dead?"

"Ross? No. He'll live. He is——"

"No, no. The other man. Was it——"

"I think he is dead," he returned with grave sternness. "I hope that he is. It was Hawley. He set a trap for a man he was afraid of. He tricked him into the light and shot him down."

"Ask her—who built—the fire!" came Ross's voice, a weak fluttering half whisper.

"You mean——"

There was accusation in Hard Ross's voice; Sherrod's eyes were suddenly steely with a cold glitter as they flashed upon the wide eyes of the girl.

"I—I——" she cried wildly. "Oh, my God! my God!"

And then, her voice ringing like a wail of despair, she had thrown her arms up high above her head, had brought her hands down so that they covered her white face

and then she was gone, the shimmer of her gown fluttering away from them until it was lost through the trees.

Fancy Jim Sherrod stared after her a moment, his eyes frowning, his lips hard set. Then with a little grunt which told nothing, he swung upon his heel and strode into the mouth of the pass where Hawley lay.

He stopped a moment and looked down on the sprawling figure with hard, expressionless eyes. Hawley's gun lay just beyond the outstretched finger-tips; the body was very still.

With swift strides he passed on and into the narrow, dark throat of the cañon. Once or twice he stopped, listening. The horse would not be far away. And then he heard the low jingle of bridle chain and went on quickly.

The horse stood in a sharp turn of the trail, its tie rope dropped over the limb of a tree. He caught up the rope and led the animal back into the firelight. A little coughing grunt from Hard Ross told him that the foreman had been watching for him. It was a rangy sorrel, not Silver Slippers.

"Never mind, Ross. We'll get your horse back for you yet. And we'll send the sorrel along the trail to the Bar Diamond as a sort of foreword that we're coming."

He yanked off saddle and bridle for fear that they might "hang up" the animal upon some snag of rock or tree, swung the horse about in the trail and struck it smartly upon the rump with the palm of his hand, sending it shying wildly about its master's body, snorting its terror and fleeing along the up trail. Then he came back to Ross.

"You're done up too badly to make the trip back to the bunk-house, old fellow," he said gently. "I'm going to take you in here. You'll spend the night with the Maddens and if you're in shape we'll get you home tomorrow."

The last bit of Hard Ross's iron strength had left him and he was lying back, his eyes closed, his face dead white. Sherrod stooped, slipped his hands under the broad shoulders and then straightened up abruptly, swinging about at the sound of a footstep almost at his side.

A man—he told himself that this was Mr. Madden, Dawn's stepfather—was almost at his elbow. With a distinct feeling of curiosity, he stared into the man's face. And there came to him an instinctive feeling of distrust when he looked upon it for the first time.

It was the face of a man of the city, pale, looking colorless in the quivering firelight, the complexion of a man who sees little of the outdoors, the pallor an unhealthy whiteness. The features were fine, delicate even, the forehead high, the eyes deep-set and brilliantly black. Against the finely chiseled lines of the lips and nostrils the heavy jet-black eyebrows were strangely out of place. The man himself seemed out of place here under the steep ruggedness of the cliffs and his costume—he wore a dark dressing-gown which fell almost to his heels and a pair of slippers—accentuated the already marked incongruity.

"I'm Mr. Madden," he said sharply. "I heard you speak my name. What's been happening here?"

"This man is badly hurt," Sherrod answered slowly. "He has a couple of bullet-holes through him, and——"

"I heard the firing. Who is he?" with the same sharp tone that hinted at suspicion.

"He is Ross, the Up and Down foreman."

"Who shot him? You?"

"No. A man named Hawley."

"Where's Hawley then?"

"Back there," a bit impatiently, "in the trail."

"What's he staying there for? Why doesn't he come on or run for it?"

"For the same reason that Ross doesn't move," shortly. "And as I said a moment ago Ross is badly hurt. I want to bring him inside. When I mentioned your name——"

"You can't bring him into my house," snapped Madden. "I haven't any desire to get mixed up in this brawl!"

"You don't mean," returned Sherrod, his words coming very slowly, each word marked by a great lack of expression, "that you refuse to let this man be taken into your house?"

"That is exactly what I do mean," Madden answered him coolly. "This is none of my affair; I refuse to have anything to do with a drunken brawl."

"It was not a drunken brawl, Mr. Madden," quietly. "I think that you know that. It was a sober enough quarrel, God knows. Just a white man shot down by a crook."

"Who's the white man? Who's the crook?" cried Madden, a little of his coldness gone. "What do I know about it? I knew Hawley. He was a good, steady man. I don't know you fellows and I don't want to."

He swung upon his heel, stepping back into the shadows. Sherrod called to him.

"Wait! I tell you that Ross is badly hurt! He needs care. If he lies out here in the night it is going to kill him; if I try to carry him five miles back to the bunk house it is going to kill him. You've got to let me carry him where I can do what I can for him!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort," came Madden's voice. It was curt, its tone final. "If he dies it isn't my doing."

Sherrod didn't answer. He turned abruptly and again bent over Hard Ross.

"Can you get your arms around my neck?" he asked gently. "Try to help, Ross. Hold on if you can. I may have to use my right hand."

Ross lifted his two big hands weakly and clasped them about Sherrod's neck. Sherrod straightened up, lifting his foreman in his arms, and remembering the landmarks which he had seen this morning, the great square block of granite, the log bridge, the stream escaping from between the two big boulders, made his way carefully, slowly toward the shelter which had been refused him.

"You're goin' to take me in anyhow?" whispered Ross faintly.

"Don't talk," answered Sherrod quietly. "Of course I am."

So they came to the log and Sherrod carried his burden across it and to the entrance between the two boulders. But Madden had been before him, a great door of thick, rough-hewn slabs had been drawn shut, a heavy lock showed how it was fastened.

He laid Ross down upon a level, grassy spot near the door and cried out loudly,

"Stand aside in there! I'm going to shoot the lock off!"

He waited a moment; no answer came, there was no sound from inside. He whipped a revolver from its holster, placed the muzzle close to the lock and the roar of his gun echoed loudly through the still cañons. He put his knee to the door, pressed and the thick panels flew back.

Again he took Ross up into his arms and moved across the threshold. Now, stepping from the dimness of the forest, he came suddenly into a brilliantly illuminated interior. A great lamp swung from a beam high above his head, other lamps lighted the walls. And they were electric lights!

That at first startled him. Then he saw

how simple a thing it could be here where the water-power of leaping falls was unlimited, realized how easily a man might install his own electric lighting-plant and be profligate with illumination here where profligacy would be cheap enough. But still, as he moved on, his eyes alert and watchful, he marveled at the things which he saw.

He was in a wide, high room, whose walls and ceiling were of beautifully veined, highly-polished woods, whose floor was hard wood, glistening and bare save for the great bear-skin rugs here and there. There were a couple of couches lost under soft cushions, two or three deep leather chairs and little other furniture.

He barely noted a rare painting upon one wall, a piece of exquisite statuary upon a pedestal, the silken curtains draping a wide door at the end of the room. He had found a place to lay Hard Ross; that was the main thing now. So he stepped to the nearest couch and placed the wounded man upon the cushions.

"I suppose that you realize that you are breaking the law, Mr. Sherrod?"

It was Madden's voice and Madden was standing there across the room, his hand upon the curtains he had swept aside from the doorway. The pale face was distorted by a black rage; the eyes burned malevolently; the lips writhed over the low spoken words.

"I realize that the only law which counts at a time like this is the law of humanity, Mr. Madden," Sherrod returned sternly. "If you will make out your bill I shall be glad to pay for any damages done."

He again gave his attention to Ross, stripping away the clothing from the limp, blood-stained bulk of the man's body, seeking again to stop the flow of blood. But he did not turn his back upon his unwilling host.

To Sherrod who had known many men of many types, who had lived his life as he had found it where life runs its way untrammelled, where the expected is often enough the unexpected, this attitude of Madden's was beyond comprehension. For one man to deny shelter to another who was in the sorest need as Hard Ross so plainly was called either for some great, compelling motive or for a nature such as Sherrod had never met. He had known hard men, cruel men, bad men and good; he had never yet

known a man who would deny shelter and aid to a man shot down at his front door.

While working over Hard Ross he turned his eyes again and again to the white-faced man watching him in stony silence. He saw the look in Madden's eyes, saw while he could not understand it. He saw Madden's hands nervously busied with whatever they chanced to touch, the quick fingers turning and twisting at the tassel of the cord about his dressing-gown, twitching at the silk curtains against which his tall, meager frame was still outlined, running aimlessly across the close-shaven chin.

He saw that the man was anxious, worried, upon the verge of some nervous, querulous, explosive speech. And yet as the moments ran by Madden did not stir from his place, his eyes did not leave the two figures at the couch, he did not speak.

"The man is afraid of something," Sherrod told himself. "If it's any one principal emotion he's struggling with it's fear! Fear of what?"

He shrugged his shoulders and did not try to answer his own question. It was beyond him. Perhaps future events would show.

"What about the man Hawley?" At last Madden had broken the silence. Sherrod had been working ten minutes over the still form of his foreman and now straightened up. "Are you going to leave him out there for the coyotes?"

It was coldly spoken; there was no hint of emotion in the even tones.

"I am going out to look to him in a moment," Sherrod returned as coldly. "I expect to find that he is dead. With your permission I'll bring the body into the house."

"And without my permission?"

"Yes," quietly. "I'll bring him in anyway."

Madden's lips curled back, for a second showing his sharp white teeth. Then he too shrugged.

"Do as you please," he snapped. "You'll spatter blood over everything I own, I suppose. I wish the whole crowd of you was in hell."

He turned with the last word, the silk curtains dropped back to place behind him and he had gone.

"If you're goin' out," it was Hard Ross's voice coming faint and tremulously, "slip my gun in my hand, Sherrod. I don't trust that man none!"

"My God!" cried Sherrod. "You don't think he'd murder you, do you?"

"Slip my gun in my hand, anyway," said Ross.

Sherrod placed Ross's revolver on the couch so that Ross's lax fingers rested on the butt of it. He had seen men badly hurt before now; he knew that all that Hard Ross needed, a hard man in that great physique of him, a hard man to die, was rest now, care afterward, and went outside. He came to the mouth of the pass where the body of Hawley lay as he had left it. And then, white and wide-eyed, he found Dawn Madden.

"He is dead," she said colorlessly.

She had been crouching down over the quiet body; now she rose slowly and stood rigid and straight, the look of one stricken upon her drawn, white face.

"I don't think I ever knew until now just what it means to be dead," she went on in that strange, even voice. "I keep thinking, over and over, what he was just a few minutes ago—and what he is now."

Suddenly her rigid tenseness broke under a terrible shivering which shook her body piteously.

"And—my God! It is I who have done this!" she cried wildly.



THEN Sherrod did not seek to remember that it had been her hands which had lighted the fire which had so nearly brought Ross to his death but chose only to say to himself that here was a woman torn with the violence of horror and grief, and that that woman had scarcely left girlhood behind her and that her name was Dawn Madden.

"Dawn," he said very gently, "you must not talk like that. And you must not think like that. Listen to me, Dawn, poor little tortured Dawn Madden."

Gently he had laid a hand upon her shaking shoulder; instinctively he felt that now was a time when a spoken word might speak less eloquently to a cringing soul than the quiet touch of a sympathetic hand. But she jerked away from him, drawing away step by step until the body of Hawley lay between them.

"I lighted the fire; you fired the shot," she said harshly. "We are two murderers, you and I."

"You are a poor little girl who should never have seen a sight like this," he said softly. "But you must try——"

"Tell me," she cried fiercely, without heeding him, "is Ross dead, too? Is he going to die?"

Before he could answer he saw her out-flung hand drop limply to her side, saw her body seem to relax, beginning to sway, and thought that she was going to fall. In an instant he was at her side, his arms had crept about her, and he was holding her tight seeking to comfort her, longing for some way in which he might physically interpose his body between hers and all trouble in the world.

But again her trembling body had stiffened and she had thrust him away from her.

"Don't let him die," she said dully. "You mustn't let him die." Swiftly her two hands shot out gripping his shoulders convulsively. "Listen: if Ross dies it means that tonight I have caused the death of two men."

And then, in a flash, she was gone from him. Gone, not into the house but down to the lake side, beyond the upper shore and on into the wilderness of great trees and giant cliffs. And Jim Sherrod, watching her until the darkness hid her, felt his heart going out of him after her.

X



ALREADY the silver globe of the moon had floated high above the cliffs; its soft radiance flooded the surfaces of the lakes and made intricate patterns of light and grotesque shadows. It was a night of rare loveliness and serenity, and yet to Sherrod it breathed a vague, impalpable, uncertain threat.

It seemed to him that the very stillness about him was the hush of death, the quiet of expectancy, a listening of all nature for the something which was going to happen before the moon had gone its journey through the blue arch and the sun had come. He could not but feel that the misgivings which had inspired Hard Ross to ask that his gun be placed where his fingers could curve about the grip were born of the fancies of a fevered brain. And yet he sensed the sweeping onward of other forces to some end which he could not see, and he went swiftly, a little anxiously about the thing he had to do. He wanted it over and done with; he wanted to be back there with Hard Ross, watchful over his wounded foreman.

The moon ended his brief hesitation for him. A long, ghostly finger of light, quivering through the swaying grass, trembling across the Upper Lake, pointed to the dugout against the cliffs on the further side. He could put Hawley there, close the door, pile rocks against it and there leave the body until Plummer's men could come for it.

He strode rapidly about the head of the lake and to the dugout door. He could see in the bright moonlight that the rough building was, as Dawn had told him, very old. The rotting logs looked as if a man could jam his fist through them. The door, of heavy oak slabs, looked as flimsy a thing as the rest of the shack.

He put his hand against the door and pushed against it, at first gently, then firmly. The door did not budge. That surprised him a little, though at first he paid no great attention to it. He put his shoulder against it and threw his weight upon the old, worm-eaten panels expecting to lift the thing off its rusted hinges. Still it did not give a fraction of an inch.

"That's funny," muttered Sherrod.

He looked closer. Then he saw at the side of the door and in the shadow of the square door-post, a heavy padlock.

"And that's stranger yet," he told himself irritably, "to put a lock like that on the door of a building whose walls a good puff of wind would blow down!"

Of no mind to shoot this lock off as he had done another already tonight, he left the door and went to the side of the dugout. He found a log that was lying loosely in its place, its surface rotten, and with a quick jerk pulled it away so that he could slip his hand through the opening he had made. And as he did so there came swift warning to him that he was being watched and that here, in the moonlight was no place to loiter.

A rifle-shot cracked sharply through the silence and a bullet whizzing by his head imbedded itself in the wall. He leaped backward into the shadow. But not before he had realized that the shot had been fired from the strange house where he had left Hard Ross; not until he had felt what lay behind the wall of rotting logs. And of the two things the rifle bullet puzzled him far less.

For his fingers, bursting through the dead wood, had come against a solid wall,

a wall which he knew was of sheet iron. This old shack, looking so flimsy a shell for the wind to blow down, was in reality like a steel safe, walls and door and roof no doubt being lined within by a substance which would turn a bullet, defy an ax, yield only to a thing like dynamite or giant powder.

"Madden's storeroom!" muttered Sherrod, as drawn back into the shadows his eyes went first to the little puff of smoke hanging ghostly in the pale light where some one—Madden, he felt sure—had fired at him, and then to the dugout before him. "Walls of sheet iron, one wall the granite cliff itself! What has the man got so precious that he hides it here? He shot to kill that time, too! I think, Mr. Madden," and his eyes were hard and stern as he drew still further back to return in a wide curve to the dwelling, "I think you're going to have some questions to answer before very long."

Walking warily, slipping swiftly through the darkest shadows, he came back to the spot where Hawley lay. He gathered up the quiet body in his arms and stepping boldly into the light now went swiftly to the broad entrance between the two big boulders. He saw nothing, heard nothing of Madden or of any one else who might have fired that shot at him; he came into the room where Hard Ross lay and placed his burden upon another couch at the far end of the room.

"Sherrod!"

"Yes, Ross."

He went to Ross's side in answer to the whisper and bent low over him.

"Don't talk if you can help it," he said gently. "You're going to be all right, but you need all the strength you've got."

"Yes, I know," panted Ross weakly. "But—I heard a rifle."

"That's all right. Some one took a pot-shot at me and missed."

"M a d d e n," whispered the foreman. "Look out for him. I saw him run get his rifle. The curtains were caught back."

"I thought so. It's all right, I tell you, Ross. I'll keep my eyes open."

"Make him come in here. Keep him where you can watch him. He's up to something crooked. I saw it in his eyes."

"The sooner they show their hands the better now," Sherrod snapped. "We're ready for them. And you, Ross, you just lie back and rest. I want you to hurry

up and get back into shape. You're the best man I've got and I'm going to need you before this thing is over."

A hard smile tightened the foreman's white lips. For a little he lay very still, scarcely seeming to breathe, his fingers lying relaxed upon the grip of the revolver at his side. And then, his eyes coming back from the ceiling and resting upon Sherrod's he whispered:

"Sen' for the rest of the boys; we'll need 'em in the mornin'. Jus' start my horse; he'll go. The boys'll see him in the corrals firs' thing in the mornin' an——"

"Yes," interrupted Sherrod thoughtfully. "I'll do that."

In a corner of the room he found a writing-table. He wrote a short note in pencil to fasten to the horn of the saddle, explaining that Ross was hurt, that he and Ross were at Madden's, and ordering Sunny Harper and Little John to come right away and to bring some sort of stretcher with them; they were to rush a man to White Rock for a doctor.

Then once more he left the room, found Ross's horse and his own where they had been left in the trail, started his foreman's saddle animal on the down trail as he had started Hawley's on the up trail only without removing the saddle to which he tied the note, tethered his roan to browse during the night and came back quickly. He saw no thing of Madden, heard no thing of him.

"Now, Ross," he said when he had come in and closed the outside door, "I want you to rest absolutely, to hold what strength hasn't run out of you. I won't leave you a second until the boys come. Tomorrow we'll have a doctor out from White Rock. You'll want a drink of water now; I'll scare up some whisky or coffee and shoot that into you pretty soon. Now shut your eyes, shut your mouth and rest."

Somehow the night dragged through. Hard Ross, all that his name implied, lay very still through the long hours, breathing heavily, with never a groan, never a complaint to tell that he suffered all that a man must suffer with two bullet-holes through his body. Again and again he turned his eyes to Sherrod, asking mutely for a drink of water; many times during the night Sherrod moved him a little upon his cushions, trying to make him more comfortable.

Few words were spoken and yet before the sun came up the two men knew each other as two men may not come to understand through years of acquaintanceship. Essentially different personalities they were essentially alike in many things which counted.

To Sherrod, pacing back and forth or sitting quietly watching his patient, the still night brought many things to ponder upon. Dawn Madden had lighted the fire which had so nearly ended all things temporal for Hard Ross. Why? It was hard to believe that she had done so for the one purpose which seemed so obvious; she could not have done the thing so that Hawley, in hiding, could shoot down the man whom he knew to be looking for him.

Then, where was she now? He had seen her, wild with the terror of the things she had looked upon, running from the spot where men's blood had soaked into the ground, running from him, running into the heart of the still forests. Where had she gone?

He was sure that she had not come in again. He listened again and again, his ears caught by some chance sound without, the moving of a bird in the branches above, the snapping of a twig, thinking that at last she had come back. But not once did he hear her step within the house.

He heard Madden—it was a man's foot-fall, it must be Madden—moving through a room at the back. He had heard something set down upon the floor and he guessed that it was a rifle-butt. Then there had been silence; he had not again heard Madden, he had not seen him.

So his thoughts, roving back and forth, came again to the puzzle of a shack with rotting walls lined within with sheet iron. What was it for, what was this thing which Madden hid there, so precious that it called for the protection of such walls, for the secrecy which the false walls of rotting logs insured? He had seen a restlessness, a nervousness, an anxiety, almost a positive fear in Madden's eyes. Did the strange log shack have something to do with it?



SUNNY HARPER and Little John, their eyes hard and menacing, their horses' hides dripping with sweat, riding on their spurs, dashed up to the Madden place a little after midnight, flung themselves from their saddles and with

little enough ceremony threw open the door and came in. Their stern eyes found out Sherrod sitting with his chair tilted back against the wall in a corner, found the still body of Hawley and went to the darkened corner where Hard Ross lay upon his couch.

To Harper and Little John, Sherrod was still the tenderfoot and not to be considered after a quick, curt nod in his general direction. They went straight to Ross's side, bending solicitously over him.

"Hurt bad, Ross?" questioned Sunny Harper, his hat gripped tight in the strong fingers of two hands, his voice unbelievably soft.

Ross's head moved a little back and forth among his cushions, negatively.

"Hawley done it?"

"Yes."

"An' you got Hawley?"

Hard Ross hesitated. He was to "keep his mouth shut." Such were his orders from a man he was no longer ashamed to take orders from. His eyes, uncertain, went to where Sherrod sat. Sherrod, seeing, got quietly to his feet and came to the couch.

"Does it hurt you much to talk, Ross?" he asked.

"No," the foreman answered. And then, with his grim smile, "It hurts more to keep my mouth shut!"

"Then talk," said Sherrod bluntly. "Harper and Little John know how to put a double hitch in their tongues, don't they?"

"They sure do! You boys prop me up a little. I'm gettin' — tired layin' down on my back. That's good."

He sat a moment, breathing hard, while Harper and Little John watched him curiously. And then abruptly:

"Sherrod nailed Hawley," he said. "He come jus' in time. He's from the Painted Rock country—he's Fancy Jim Sherrod!"

Sunny Harper and Little John, their eyes widening, swung about as if startled by a pistol shot. And then,

"My Gawd!" gasped Sunny Harper. "Fancy Jim! An' us fools thought he was a tenderfoot!"

And Little John, stricken speechless, stood with mouth dropping open and eyes growing still wider.

"Now," said Fancy Jim Sherrod sharply, "you boys let Ross alone. He needs all the rest there is. And I'll spin you a yarn.

Things are about ripe, anyway. First, how did you happen to get here so quickly? We didn't look for you before morning."

"I heard his horse's saddle leather," said Sunny Harper, his eyes still full of wonder as they clung to the face of the new owner who was supposed to be a tenderfoot fresh from the city, and who was a man who knew more about horses and crooked trails and six guns than any one of the old Up and Down outfit. "I was layin' awake, sort 'a' worried anyhow. I knowed it was two weeks, an' I knowed Ross had gone lookin' for Hawley."

"Then I heard a horse come trottin' down to the corrals, an' it was awful still outside an' I thought I heard the funny sort of a noise saddle leather makes, creakin'. I guessed it was Ross come back. Then, when he didn't show, I got to wonderin' an' I went outside. His horse had come close to the bunk-house, nosin' after some barley spilt by the outhouse, an' I saw him an' found the note. An' me an' Little John didn't waste much time hittin' the trail."

"I'm glad you didn't," returned Sherrod. "And now I want to tell you something. I bought this outfit from D. M. Hodges, and I took it over with both my eyes open. I've been looking for a place like this for five years, ever since I sold the Painted Rock. I knew that there was a drawback; I knew that the Up and Down and other ranges hereabouts have been losing stock steadily. But I got the range at my figure and—and," significantly, "I learned that Bull Plummer was running the outfit next door. It looked to me like a pretty simple thing."

"You knew Bull Plummer before?" demanded Sunny Harper.

"I had never seen him; fortunately he had never seen me. But he worked a game with all the earmarks of this one in Montana fifteen years ago. He got away with it too; he didn't pull out until he had to, but he got out of the game on time and his sack full. I guess he's been here most of the time since. Now, my game was simply this: I buy up the outfit and come to take charge. The news gets around that I'm a tenderfoot and pretty much a fool into the bargain. I let Plummer ride right into camp and skin me out of five hundred bucks, easy play, rotten simple tricks. What happens? You boys do the usual

amount of talking and the news rides!"

Sunny Harper and Little John hung their heads and blushed.

"It's all right!" cried Sherrod softly. "I played you to do it and I'm glad you did. It boosted my game! The whole country, Bull Plummer included, takes me for a greenie and a simpleton. Now, what happens?"

"You mean," frowned Sunny Harper, his eyes sharp under his contracting brows, "that Bull Plummer's guard's down, that he'll see a chance for a raw play, that he'll make it without wastin' no time, an'——"

"An' we'll nail him!" whispered Hard Ross. "Oh, ——! I wish I was up an' ridin' a horse!"

"Lie still, Ross," commanded Sherrod. "All you've got to do right now is to take care of yourself. And you boys, you just sit close and do what you can for Ross and keep your eyes open and your right hands where you can find 'em. I'm going out for a little ride."

He swept up his hat from the chair where he had tossed it, came to Ross's side and stood for a moment looking down upon him with sympathetic eyes, and then with no word to any of them was gone swiftly and silently.

"So it's ol' Fancy Jim!" whispered Sunny Harper, his eyes bright, his voice shaking a little. "An' he's got ol' Bull Plummer jumpin' after the bait like a sucker, his mouth wide open an' his eyes shet! An' us fellers is about due to see a spell of high life real soon. Huh, Ross?"

Whereupon Hard Ross nodded and then lay back very still, determined to take Sherrod's advice, to get his strength back in time for the show-down.

 MEANWHILE Fancy Jim Sherrod leaving the Madden place behind him went to where he had left his horse, saddled again hastily and mounting rode away through the splotches of moonlight and pools of shadow. And he rode the trail which Dawn Madden had taken in her wild flight from the spot where the fire her own hands had made had cast its light over such a happening as she could never forget.

"She's out here somewhere," muttered Sherrod. "The thing is enough to drive a girl like her mad! And standing it all alone—it's too much for her."

He felt that there was a chance for him to find her, a slight chance but then if fortune was with him he might come upon her. And there was now no reason for him to sit still in idleness when his whole being craved action.

He rode the way his eyes had followed her as long as she was in sight, saw that she must have taken a well-defined trail leading along the cliffs, turning so that it swung around in a half circle toward the mountains behind Madden's home. As the trail wound so did it climb, a narrow foothold hanging precariously to the granite cliffs, at times slipping between two upthrust shafts of rock with barely room for a horse to pass through, at times clinging to the outer surface with sheer height below and above.

He felt certain that she had gone this way; there seemed no other way open to her unless she had turned aside into the tangle of brush and chaos of tumbled boulders through which she could hardly have made her way in the uncertain light.

Yes, she would follow an open trail, the first open trail which her flying feet could find. Her spirit would be driving her on, urging her to hasten away from a spot that was still full of terror for her, clamoring to her to run from the pools of inky darkness below, to seek the white light of the uplands. He was certain that he was going to find her.

And yet he stepped whenever there was a bit of sandy soil in the trail and a bit of moonlight, looking for her tracks. And at last, high up above the floor of the valley, in a little gorge where the sandy floor was damp, he found the mark of her moccasins.

"Poor little frightened thing," he muttered as he straightened up. And then, his words bespeaking the swift trend of his thought: "—that man Madden! Why must he drag her into the mess?"

Here in this gorge he left his horse securely tethered. From here he must go on foot. The way was too narrow, too illy defined, too steep, at times being a straight upward climb over a fallen boulder, for his horse to travel it. He came at last to what he had thought from below to be the top of the cliffs; here he stood for a moment, panting, his eyes sweeping the expanse of moonlit country.

About him were peaks innumerable where the cliffs were split into ragged rock formations looking like towers and mosques

and cathedral spires, a sleeping white city upon a floor of white. For a fog had risen from the lakes and the creek and lay in a great horizontal blanket shutting out the valley below, made snowy by the full moon above. The granite of the many shaped peaks was white, the whole a strangely ghostly vision city, piled in midair by some weird race of giants.

He was standing upon a little, sloping plateau where a little soil had accumulated in the hollows, where many frail-looking, hardy-natured flowers grew. He turned slowly, bring his eyes away from the fog covering the valley, and turning he saw, a little further to the north, a great steep sided tower of rock lifting its crest like a lofty campanile five hundred feet above the benchland upon which he stood. The moonlight touched the monumental peak, showed the black fissures in the grayish white of the stone and outlined the summit against the star-set sky with rare, soft distinctness.

"Daybreak Spire!" he whispered. "She is up there—and I am going to keep tryst!"

And then because the night was very clear, the moon almost at the full, the night air like crystal, he saw her where she stood upon the very crest of Daybreak Spire, her slender body outlined against the sky, starset. And it seemed to him that now more than ever was she like the spirit of the solitude; the great star scintillating with its diamond lights, pulsing with its green and white and blue fires, seemed set in her hair, a flashing jewel to crown a white queen, the tribute of the night to a maiden of the dawn.

She seemed lonely up there, alone. The world shut off from her by the white vapors below, all humanity lost to her in the stillness of the night. She seemed, in some way which he could not understand, to be in need of him. She seemed in some way which he could not grasp, to be calling to him. He was in the shadow of the base of the peak. Had she seen him?

He began climbing swiftly.

XI



HAD Jim Sherrod been in reality the tenderfoot which he had seemed to be when Dawn Madden invited him to find her upon Daybreak Spire, he would not have been able to keep the

engagement lightly offered, seriously accepted. For there was but one way along which a man might come to the top of the high lifted, dizzy pinnacle, and it was not a way which a man who did not know the great outdoors would have found.

The obvious path, promising everything, fulfilling nothing, showed invitingly as he came close up to the base of the peak. Had he followed it as he would have done had he known nothing of the way of a seemingly plain mountain trail, he would have clambered half way to the point he was working for and would have found there his trail coming to an end upon a little shelf of rock with a perpendicular rise of cliff rising fifty baffling feet above him. He would have wasted time here; he would in the end have come back to the base; he would have lost much time here in seeking the right trail and in the end unless his luck were far greater than his knowledge of such matters he would have found nothing.

But Jim Sherrod knew inscrutable Mother Nature sufficiently to know that her disposition is such that all civilizations bestow upon her the gender feminine, that her way is to say most often what she does not mean, that she delights to baffle man and sit serene above him watching him struggle for her hidden meaning. He saw the plain trail, and he stopped to make a cigarette before he decided that what was obvious was right.

Dawn had gone ahead of him; to the tenderfoot it would have been difficult to know just which way she had gone. But Sherrod, upon his hands and knees in the moonlight, saw that she had not gone the obvious way.

There was not a broken twig there to mark where her foot had rested, not a faint imprint in the loose soil of a hollow, not a sign of a stripped branch there where she would have reached out to the stunted chaparral bush to help herself over the one steep climb. And so he looked elsewhere and found the way she had gone.

She had clambered straight up the side of the cliff for ten feet, helping herself by the cracks in the rock, by the branches of a manzanita growing hardily in a rent in the granite wall. There were a few fresh leaves at the bottom; there was the mocassin print in the soil at the foot of the shrub.

Sherrod climbed up swiftly when he had found the signs he sought. And then he came upon a narrower, steeper, more broken trail, hardly more than a series of precarious footholds and hand-holds, that led its circuitous, hazardous way to the topmost point of Daybreak Spire. And after half an hour's climb he came to her side.

"I have come before the appointed hour, Miss Madden," he said quietly. "But I wanted to talk with you. You will forgive me?"

She was standing as he had seen her when first he came to the tableland below, looking out into the night. She had not moved in all this time, he thought swiftly. She was unconscious of physical fatigue or discomfort; she was fighting her battle of the spirit tonight. He felt that dimly though he could not understand yet just what that battle was.

She turned to him slowly, quietly. The terror he had seen in her eyes down there in the valley had not entirely gone yet; he knew that she had not yet shut out of them the sight of the thing she had seen. But her manner was quiet, her features composed. Her face was very white; she did not know it but Sherrod saw that she was very, very tired.

"I want to talk with you," he said again very gently. "I want you to sit down and listen to me."

She did not answer; she did not move the fixity of her gaze from his eyes.

"You poor little girl," he murmured softly, "you're pretty well done up and I don't think that you know it. Come, you're going to sit down and rest. If you don't relax a bit you're going to pieces."

He laid his hand very gently upon her arm. She shook it off with a little shudder. He felt that she was trembling.

Still saying nothing she moved back from the edge of the cliff and to a slab of rock ten feet away where with a little shivery sigh she sat down. Sherrod, standing half a dozen feet from her looked down into the eyes which were still turned upon him, saw that their expression had not changed.

"Hawley is dead," she said, her voice strangely steady.

"Yes. But you must not blame——"

"I know what I know," she went on in the same steady voice which somehow told

more eloquently of an unutterable soul weariness than if it had been choked with tears. "And Ross? Will he die, too?"

"No," gently. "Ross is going to get well. He's badly hurt, but men builded like Ross can stand up under a whole lot of punishment."

"But Hawley is dead. And you—you killed him!"

Thoughtfully, quietly spoken, a little contraction of the brows showing in the moonlight and telling how she was trying to see clearly all that had happened, to understand everything, to seek to know just where right lay, just where wrong.

"Yes," he answered quietly.

Now he understood why she had shuddered when he had sought to draw her back from the verge of the precipice. And to himself he said again:

"Poor little Dawn! It's a bad, bad mess for a sweet little lady like you to be drawn into."

"You are so conventionally polite!" she said with the first display of anything bordering on emotion in her voice. "It makes me wonder if you are quite human, if you realize just what has happened tonight—what part you have had in it!"

"You mean that I have killed a man and am not hysterical over it? That instead of thinking of your comfort now I should be in all things primitive and coarse and brutal? That it would fit in better with what has happened and that you could feel that the events of a night are real because they then would seem in harmony? Is that it?"

She shivered as if cold. And still she looked at him curiously.

"I think you have guessed what I feel," she said, her voice again dispassionate and very steady. He could see her white hands clenching desperately as they clung to each other. "It is a horrible thing to kill a man, It seems almost more horrible for the man who has done that to be unmoved by the thing he has done only a few hours ago."

Sherrod made no answer. He had not forgotten; it was one of the things which a man would never forget. He was not unmoved. And yet the things which he felt must lie locked up in his own breast; he would not regret, he would not let it sadden him. And yet it would make of him a sterner, harder man.

"I heard Ross call you Fancy Jim Sher-

rod," she was saying now. "Who are you? Are you—that man?"

"Men have called me Fancy Jim Sherrod," he answered slowly. "I am from the Painted Rock country."

"Then you—you have killed other men! This was not the first time?"

"I have killed other men," he said gravely. Then, his voice sterner than she had guessed it could be, sterner than she had ever heard a man's voice until now: "I am not a gun-fighter, Miss Madden. I am not a brawler. I do not seek quarrels. I would draw on no man in the world save in self-defense or in the defense of another man or of my rights. Tonight—you saw it—you know that there was no other way."

"You fired to kill." She paused a moment, staring at him with her piteously wide eyes. "I saw. You fired; you put your revolver back into its holster without looking to see what had happened. You knew before you pressed the trigger—that there would be no need to look!"

"Yes. And if I had not fired? Would Hard Ross be alive now? He was down; his gun had fallen from his hands; he had two bullets through his body; and Hawley was still shooting! Was it a time for me to wait?"

For a long time she was silent. And then she answered as if the making of a reply were a thing she must do.

"I suppose that you did right. I suppose that a man could do what you did and still be a good man. And yet—oh, God! I'd rather be dead than do the thing you did! I'd rather be dead than have you touch me!"

Then at last her head drooped into her hands, she shivered from the moonlit crown of her hair to her moccasined feet. And in a moment Sherrod could hear her sobs, could see the shaking of her body.

He waited patiently until the sobbing ceased, until the tortured body was still. And then when he spoke it was more gently than before.

"You don't understand all that a man may feel," he began. "There are times in a country like ours where a man must take upon himself a very great responsibility, the greatest responsibility perhaps which a man can shoulder. He must decide in a matter which concerns not himself alone but the whole social fabric. He must decide what he will do. Will he be a man

and stand by his rights and by his friends; will he weaken when the test comes and prove himself all incompetent to live the life a man must live in the wild places of the West? He has one swift fraction of a second to decide—and that brief moment measures him as man or manikin. It would have been easier for me to have held back and let Hawley put his third bullet through Ross's brain. And yet—"his voice hardened a little—"you would rather be dead than have me lay my hand upon your arm!"

He did not look at her now but his eyes went moodily to rest upon the bank of mist lying below them, shutting out the valley. During the slow minutes in which neither spoke both had their bitter thoughts. And then, seeking to draw her thoughts into a divergent channel and because he must know this, he asked suddenly:

"You made that brush fire, Miss Maden. Why?"

She started up, lifting her head, her eyes widening again.

"I ———"

She hesitated and stopped. He could see that her lips were tight compressed.

"We shall not wait for the dawn here," was what she said quietly. She rose and stood looking down upon him, her eyes filled with doubt. "We are going down to the house. And——"

"And you will tell me there?" he asked when again she fell silent.

"I shall tell you there," she replied. "Or I shall say nothing to you and—and I shall not see you any more."

She left him, walking swiftly. He followed her, making no further attempt at speech with her.

He watched her, fearful more than once that her tired body was unable to cope with the exigencies of the dangerous trail, ready to reach out and snatch back her falling body if she slipped. And yet not once did he offer his hand as they traveled downward. For she would rather be dead than have him touch her.



WHEN they came down to where Sherrod's tethered horse was waiting the first faint light of the false dawn was shining about the crest of Day-break Spire above them. They dropped down into the mist, passed through it and came at last to the lake. In a little it would be sunup here.

They had not spoken once on the long downward trail. At the door through which Sherrod was to enter the house she left him. She would go in at some door at the back. Now she spoke swiftly, as if she would have it over with.

"You will want to eat, I suppose! Come to me in the breakfast-room in half an hour. I shall have something to tell you then—or I shall never speak with you again."

And she had gone, and Sherrod entering saw swiftly that during his absence there had happened something serious.

Sunny Harper, standing leaning over Ross's couch as Sherrod threw open the door, whirled suddenly and came forward, his face stern and hard, his eyes blazing.

"Plummer's put another one acrost on us!" he snapped angrily. "Right under our noses!"

"What is it?" demanded Sherrod.

"Mute jus' rode up with the word. Him an' Little John is outside takin' a look aroun'. You know that herd of beef steers we slapped into the Big Tree meadow? They're gone, the whole fifty head!"

"And you think that Plummer——"

"Who else?"

"I'm glad," said Jim Sherrod very quietly. Sunny Harper stared incredulously. "Yes, I'm glad. We're going to get busy, Sunny. We're going to trail those steers. We're going to find them on the Bar Diamond and it's going to be the last deal Bull Plummer puts across with this outfit!"

"They're the pick of the range, Sherrod." It was Hard Ross's voice. "They're worth a good eighty dollars a head. Over four thousand dollars of stock gone an' me flat of my back."

"Ross," said Sherrod sternly, "you lie still and get well. I'm going to need you pretty soon. We needn't hope that one night will end this thing. Harper, go out and find Mute and Little John. Send Little John on the jump back to the bunkhouse. I want all of the boys here; I want 'em on the run and armed. They're to have breakfast before they start. Then you come back here and look out for Ross. Send Mute here too. I want to talk with him."

Hard Ross, his eyes filled with the bitterness within him, bitterness that now, with the time for action at hand, he was out of it, lay back with a little grunt. Sunny Harper sped away upon his errand.

And Jim Sherrod, coming to Ross's side to ask how he had passed the night, heard from somewhere in the house the low voice of Dawn, the sharp, impatient tones of Madden.

"We'll have a doctor here before long, Ross," he said, trying to shut out of his ears the indistinct voices. "We'll leave you here until he comes. I'll leave one of the boys with you. Then we'll move you down to the bunk-house, if he orders it, or we'll fix up a bed for you and move you into town, if he advises that."

"You're goin' after Plummer this trip?" asked Ross.

"We're going to try and find out where those steers went. Why, their tracks won't be cold yet! And we're going to bring them back. And—yes, I think that we'll have to ride over to the Bar Diamond to get them."

Then Mute Adams came in, his steady eyes a trifle curious and showing a new respect as they rested upon the owner of the Up and Down.

"Tell me about those steers, Mute," commanded Sherrod crisply. "How did you learn about it so soon?"

Then Mute belied his name and spoke swiftly and to the point:

"After Sunny an' Little John pulled out, sayin' Ross was hurt bad, none of us fellers went back to sleep. We loafed aroun' an' had coffee an' jus' got res'less, wonderin' jus' what had happened. Me an' Happy Day finally got the hunch we'd ride on up this way an' see about things. We rode slow, talkin' about things, thinkin' maybe we'd meet you or Little John or Sunny Harper comin' back. Sunny had said for us to stick at the bunk-house until he sent word.

"Then we come into Big Tree meadow an' I said to Happy, 'Them big steers'll be rollin' in fat in another week, Hap.' An' Hap he nods an' says, 'Yep, in case somebody don't run the bunch off!' An' then he sorta laughs, not thinkin' what he's sayin' might of happened. It didn't seem nowise possible.

"An' then we come to the wide part of the meadow where we oughta see some of them steers, it's so bright with the moon, an' we don't see anything. Hap looks at me an' I looks at Hap kinda funny. 'Shucks,' we says; 'they're right over yonder, under the cliffs.' So we mooches

over an' we're ridin' a little mite faster now, too. The steers wasn't there an' they wasn't nowhere. Tracks didn't tell much, seein' the meadow's all full of tracks. But pretty soon, down by the crick we found tracks as did talk. There was shod horses' tracks, an' right on the south bank of the crick where there's mud an' long grass we come acrost a sign a man could of read even if there wasn't no moon.

"A man had crossed the crick there, drivin' half a dozen steers, an' his horse had fell, an' there's the prints of the horse's knees an' the stirrup where it cut into the mud. An' it was so fresh the water as had seeped into the place was all riled up an' muddy yet! An' nary a one of them fifty steers in sight! Me an' Hap didn't waste much time foggin' on here after that."

"You did try to see which way the herd had gone, however?" asked Sherrod.

"Yes, we tried. But I tell you the meadow's all cut up too much to show signs in the night-time. We got a pretty good guess there was five or six saddle-horses, an' we got the guess the steers was crowded on the run acrost to the dark under the cliffs."

"The south cliffs?" quickly.

"Yes, the south cliffs," Mute Adams nodded. "The side nex' the Bar Diamond. Close up there, you know, it's all rocky an' hard an' broken, the sorta groun' as don't hold no tracks. An' there a man couldn't say if they went east towards the Lower En' or west towards the Upper En'. So we come on here."

"What time do you think the thing happened?" asked Sherrod.

"I'd jedge about midnight. Not over four or five hours ago. An'," he burst out violently, think of the nerve of it! "A night of a full moon as bright as day! Gawd!"

"Never mind, Adams," said Sherrod quietly. "Those steers were wild and stubborn and unruly. They won't get very far in four hours, not through these mountains. They must have come up this way, skirted the lake on the other side and turned southward through the pass. We'll find the tracks there; we'll find the cattle on the Bar Diamond! You boys be ready," this as Sunny Harper came back into the room. "That means," briefly, "be ready for trouble! Have you boys got your guns with you?"

They nodded shortly.

"We been more or less expectin' trouble as soon's we found out Ross was shot up," replied Sunny Harper.

"All right. Wait here. I'm going to try to scare up something to eat."

He had for a little forgotten the indistinct voices coming to him from the deeper interior of the house. Now again he heard them, Madden's irritable voice expostulating, Dawn's tones hushed and troubled. And then there was an angry cry from Madden, a scream from the girl, and Sherrod calling back, "Stay with Ross!" ran to the silk curtains, flung them back and with no more ado ran toward the rear of the house.

First came a great, high room which would have drawn his admiration had he had any time for such an emotion. Here was the spring, bubbling up clear and cool in a rock-rimmed basin, dancing across the stone floor in a little hollowed channel, to sink out of sight and run under the floor of the room he had left, to appear again outside in the stream with the log bridge across it. It was like some flowery patio in a tropical home, save that, fifty feet from the floor a roof shut out the sky and glowing chandeliers made a soft light.

There were bearskin rugs everywhere, there were silken cushions, there was an exquisite bit of statuary in white marble beside a flower-edged, natural pool in which a few brilliantly speckled trout steered sharply. There were wide deep windows looking out through the trees and vines upon the outside wall; there was a broad, winding staircase of glistening hardwood leading thirty feet upward to a tiny balcony that was a riot of colored blooms, and where Sherrod's quick eyes espied couch, cushions and a table, book covered.

The voices were silent now. They had come from some room still farther back. He paused a moment, uncertain. There had been menace in that sharp cry of Madden's, there had been positive fear in the girl's. Where were they? Where a door leading to them?

At last he saw a narrow door in the extreme left-hand corner of the great room. He rushed to it, jerked it open, ran on into a long hallway, turned at the first sight of another door and suddenly found himself in a roomy kitchen where a stove was burning briskly, where the smell of bacon and coffee filled his nostrils, and where a China-

man, a big man with a hard, cruel face with all of the inscrutable stolidness of the Orient in it, was cooking breakfast. The Chinaman looked at him and away to his tray of biscuits, his face showing neither surprise nor fleeting interest.

"Where are they?" demanded Sherrod. "Madden and Miss Dawn? Where are they?"

The Chinaman looked at him again without interest, grunted, shook his head.

"Me no sabe," he answered simply.

He knew well enough, and Sherrod knew that he knew. But he saw swiftly the futility of argument, and catching sight of another door he passed hastily through the kitchen and into the breakfast-room. Table was set, a snowy cloth and gleaming silver service giving a rare touch of richness and taste here in the heart of the wild. The room was empty.

Then, before he could step to the door leading into the larger dining-room he heard another door, somewhere still deeper in the house which began to seem a vast spreading labyrinth, he heard another door close noisily and presently a man's footsteps coming swiftly toward him. A moment later Madden, his face drawn and white, his eyes hard and keen with the lights dancing like little fires in them, had come into the breakfast-room.

"For a stranger you make yourself very much at home, Mr. Sherrod," he said coolly. "May I ask what you want?"

"I want to see Miss Madden," retorted Sherrod as coolly, though his blood was running hot. "Where is she?"

"She has gone to her room, if it is any of your affair. She is tired out, very naturally, and has gone to lie down."

"But," and Sherrod's disbelief stood high in his eyes, "she was to meet me at breakfast. She was to tell me——"

"What?" snapped Madden.

"The thing you didn't want her to tell!" cried Sherrod angrily. "The thing because of which you have shut her up somewhere. Stand aside, Madden! I am going to find her for myself!"

Madden stood aside making no answer. But his eyes were harder, more full of menace than when he had come in. And besides there leaped high in their light a swift gleam of satisfaction. Sherrod, passing him, hastened through the empty rooms, calling.

XII



THE sun had flared up over the steep cliffs and was pouring a stream of golden light down upon the lakes, drinking up the fog, ushering in a brilliant cloudless day. A half dozen men, grim in their silence, were riding a dim trail whose end might well bring to any man of them his death. Fancy Jim Sherrod rode well to the front, his eyes the hard, stern eyes of a man upon a relentless quest.

An hour ago he had gone his way through the great, many-roomed house calling. He had had his answer. Dawn Madden's voice, shaking as it came to him from behind a locked door, assured him that her stepfather had spoken the truth, that she had gone to her room, that she was lying down; that she had nothing to say to him.

"Go away!" she had cried to him. "I have nothing to say to you. Go away!"

He had gone without a word spoken back to her. He had breakfasted in Madden's breakfast-room, commanding the Chinaman to bring him his food and not once addressing Madden or being addressed by him. He had seen that Sunny Harper, Mute, and Happy had had their breakfasts; he had seen that Hard Ross had had something carried to him; he had left Mute Adams to take care of the wounded man; and then the other boys had ridden up from the bunk-house.

Now, with them at his back, he was riding to the Bar Diamond. And of all the hard faces Fancy Jim Sherrod's was the hardest. He could not drag his mind entirely away from the girl who could tell him a great deal if she wished and yet who had cried, "Go away! I have nothing to say to you. Go away!"

She could not bear to have him touch her; now it seemed that she could not bring herself to speak with him. Just because he had done a man's part when it had been offered him, just because he had fired last night that shot which had come between Hard Ross and his death, because he had killed a man who was a crook and a coward and who, hidden in the dark, was pumping his lead into a man fallen, lying wounded in the firelight—the firelight which Dawn Madden had made.

These gaunt-bodied, lean, hard-muscled, keen-eyed men to whom the dimmest trail

was but a blurred, printed page, who read the signs on the ground as a man in the city reads his newspaper, had waited in a cool patience until the sun was up, until the light was strong, and then they had gone out to decipher the legend the night had scrawled along the brink of the creek.

They saw where the herd of steers had grazed in the early evening, found where one of them here and there had lain down after feeding, and knew from the deep imprints of knees and hoofs that they had been startled to their feet and swung hurriedly into line and driven from the meadow to the stony soil under south cliffs.

These were the cliffs which marked the natural fence between the Up and Down and the Bar Diamond. And here at their rock-strewn base there was nothing to show if the herd had moved east or west. In that fact, of course, lay the reason that the rustlers had driven them here.

The Up and Down boys, ready as they were at the reading of blurred signs upon the dim trail, got down from their saddles and for an hour sought to find conclusive proof which way the missing herd had gone. And in the end they had only wasted their time and had found nothing. For the steers had ranged here for ten days now, and there were everywhere broken spears of grass, trampled weeds, that might have been trodden upon after midnight or before. There were the same signs running westward as there were to the east.

"It's no use, boys," said Sherrod at last. He swung up into his saddle and reined his horse around toward the Upper End. "They took their chances on doing the job on a moonlight night; that's the only chance they took. Somewhere they've hazed the stock on over into the Bar Diamond, headed for the railroad. We'd better move on."

"Then they went through the Pass," grunted Sunny Harper. "We'll pick up the fresh trail there."

So they rode back to the lakes, around the shore, clinging close to the cliffs upon the south side, passed the cabin with its rotting log walls at which Sherrod gazed frowningly, and found the mouth of the pass.

"If they went this way," mused Sherrod, still riding silently in front of his silent cowboys, "we'll find the tracks plain enough in the first sandy-floored pocket."

So they passed from the sunlight into

the shadows of the steep-sided cañon which connected the two rangelands, the horses now forced to drop one behind another, the eyes of all the men seeking for the tracks of the stolen cattle.

At the first pocket, where there was a floor of moist sand, Sherrod drew rein. The sun was now dripping into the pass and there was no need of men getting down from their saddles. There had been no horse, no cow, to go this way since yesterday. That was plain. The only recent tracks were those left by Sherrod when he had ridden to and from the Bar Diamond, those left by Hawley's horse as it had borne its rider to the last meeting with Hard Ross and as it had raced homeward, riderless.

"There you are," grunted Sunny Harper. his face anything but sunny right now. "It's the same thing over and over again. The stock's gone, we know who took 'em—but where did they go?"

"There's some other pass through these cliffs!" retorted Sherrod sharply. "The cattle couldn't have been driven down the valley; we would have seen the tracks somewhere in the lower meadow. They couldn't have flown over the cliffs, could they? There's some other way!"

"There isn't any other way," answered Sunny Harper as positively. "Us boys would know about it."

"Then where are they?" snapped Sherrod irritably.

Sunny Harper lifted his broad shoulders.

"I dunno. Don't ask me. Ask Bull Plummer!"

On the word Sherrod shot his spurs home.

"Come on!" he cried. "We'll make an early call on Bull Plummer, anyway. And we'll find the trail on his side of the cliffs. We'll find the cattle there too."

The thing had happened as Sherrod had planned it to happen, played it to happen, and he was puzzled. It had been his hope that when the news went out over the range country that a tenderfoot had come to assume charge of the management of the Up and Down the men who had long been stealing cattle with a U & D brand would be tempted to a bold stroke, to just some such theft as this committed tonight. Then he would strike, swift and hard, and there would be the end to trouble.

The news had traveled forth as he had meant it to do, the bold stroke had been made, fifty head of cattle driven off in a

night, a moonlight night! And those big running steers had left no trail behind them.

"There's some other pass," he kept telling himself, "some way the boys have missed. And we'll find every hoof of them on the Bar Diamond or we'll find their trail there."

And still he was troubled. He had been in the valley two weeks, he had ridden much up and down, he had kept his eyes open. And he had seen no single place where a herd like this could have been thrown from the floor of this valley to a neighboring range.

They rode swiftly and made no stop until they came into the Bar Diamond pastures at the upper end where the stone and log corral was. From here they could see the Bar Diamond bunk house, could see the smoke rising from the cook's stove. A man was standing in the doorway, another man was drinking at the spring just back of the building, two more were going down to the corral, evidently for their horses.

"It seems that they've just had breakfast," said Sherrod sharply. "Let's get down there in a hurry. I want to have a look at their horses before they saddle up."

Riding in a long line, six men abreast, the Up and Down cowboys raced down upon the Bar Diamond outfit. The man in the doorway called something to another man within the house, the two men going down to the corral and the man at the spring came with quick strides back to the bunk house.

"Suspicious cusses," grunted a man at Sherrod's side.

"Why shouldn't they be?" returned Sherrod. "Now, you boys keep your mouths shut and your eyes open. This is my game; I'm playing it my way. And if I play it like a fool I know what I'm about."

Bull Plummer, bull-throated, bare of arm, was in the doorway now, his great bulk taking up most of the narrow space, his big hands busy with the cigaret he was making. No word was spoken until the six riders were close enough to him to see his eyes, eyes which were hard and watchful and told nothing.

"Good morning, Plummer." It was Sherrod speaking as he reined in his horse and the other Up and Down cowboys set their ponies up just behind him. "Seen

anything of fifty big steers wearing a U & D brand? I've lost that many since last sunset!"

Bull Plummer's eyes held steadily to the eyes of the theatrically dressed cowboy. He saw nothing in them but the thing which Sherrod wanted him to read there, a bit of vexation at his loss. Then the Bar Diamond man's gaze shifted, running like lightning to the other stern faces, the faces of the men sitting silent and leaving the talking to their boss.

"I don't quite get you, pardner," Plummer said quietly after a brief pause. "You mean—"

"I mean," broke in Sherrod impatiently. "what I say! I've lost fifty head in one night and that means close to four thousand dollars gone like that!" He snapped his white fingers and the little sound cracked distinctly through the silence which dropped down over his words. "Have you seen them?"

Plummer, while Sherrod was speaking, had stepped just outside of the bunk-house. His men, who had gone out already, were drawn close now and their eyes were as watchful, as inscrutable as his own. Four more men came out after Plummer and stood silent by the door.

Already there was a strained atmosphere over the two groups of men, although no belligerent word had been spoken. Every man was ready for the thing which might come next, the open accusation which might well lie back of the words Sherrod had said. And although there was not a gun in sight excepting the two heavy caliber Colts swinging ostentatiously at Sherrod's hips, there was not a man of them who was not ready upon the instant to "go for his gun." The men sitting in seeming carelessness in their saddles, the men lounging by the door, Bull Plummer rolling a cigaret with big, slow fingers, they were all alike alert.

"I ain't been ridin' range for the Up an' Down," said Plummer slowly. "I don't know why you come to me lookin' for your strays."

"That's just it!" cried Sherrod. "Are they strays? If they've just wandered off the range, I've got some one to fire for not attending to my business better. And if some thief has driven them off for me——"

"Go easy there, young feller!" cut in Plummer shortly. He had finished making

his cigaret, it was held between thumb and finger of his left hand, his right was caught, with thumb hooked into his belt. "It sounds almos' like you was makin' a pass it ain't healthy none to make to me! What are you drivin' at? Do you mean you're thinkin' I'm a rus'ler?"

"I don't know what to think, do I?" retorted Sherrod. "My stock's gone. Where did it go? I'm not saying you had a hand in it, am I? But you might have seen the steers if they did wander off, or one of your men might have seen them. I don't want to stir up trouble."

Plummer's deep laugh cut him short again.

"I guess you better not try to stir up anything!" he snapped. "If you jaspers is lookin' for a fight you come the right place to get it an' — quick! You jus' say I had a han' in the thing an' I'll slap the white face off'n you! Jus' the same," he sneered, "as Ross done the firs' day you showed up! You better hit the trail back to town, little man. An' hit it while the trail's open."

"But look here, Plummer——" and Plummer's men smiled at the quick change in the tone—"I'm trying to do what's right, am I not? If you'd lost a bunch like that you'd be worried too, wouldn't you? I just wanted to ask you to have a look around."

"You've asked your fool question an' you've got your answer," answered Plummer. "Now, since you're here, go take your look aroun'. But if you bring them shepherders of your'n on my place again I'm goin' to sick my men on 'em an' drive the last one of 'em off same's I'd drive a pack of kyotes."

"I hope there's no harm done," began Sherrod placatingly. And then, surprising his own men as much as he surprised Plummer, he called sharply, "Come on, boys!" shot his spurs home and sent his horse racing for the stable.

He had watched his chance and taken it. It looked like the fool play he had suggested might be expected, and Jim Sherrod knew very well what he was doing. He had waited until not a man of Plummer's outfit was within two hundred yards of the corral and barn and then in a flash he had dashed out of their midst, had raced into the corral, flung himself from the saddle when the barn was between him and the

bunk-house and had run through the big wide double doors.

There were a dozen saddle-horses in the corral and stable. He merely glanced at them, saw that their hides were dry with not a hair turned by a hard night's riding and knew that if Plummer's men had run off his steers for him they had not ridden these horses. Then he had plunged into the barn and had been there a moment, had hurried out again and thrown himself into the saddle. Even his own men, hurrying after him in a storm of thudding hoofs, with the dust puffing up like smoke after them, had not guessed what he had done.

"Come on," he called to them as they came up to him and he spurred out of the corral. And then his voice dropped so that only Sunny Harper and Happy Day heard the words, "We're coming back again—soon!"

They wondered and followed reluctantly as he led the way back toward the Up and Down. He did not tell them what the thing was which he had found. It was merely that every saddle blanket on its peg in the barn, was reeking wet with sweat!

XIII

 NOTHING had been accomplished, everything was to be done and yet the days went their swift blue way over the Up and Down cattle range with no single step taken on the road to the untangling of the puzzle perplexing Jim Sherrod. An incredible thing almost, a thing which any cattle man would have said before the act was a rank impossibility, had actually occurred: fifty big steers had gone in a single night and there had been no sign left behind to show the way they had gone. At least no visible sign, no hint to tell the keen eager eyes of the Up and Down cowboys the thing which they sought day after day to learn.

"I ain't sure," Sunny Harper was led to say at last, "but that the up-to-date rus'ler uses a airplane an' takes a string of steers off same as a chicken hawk lif's a squirrel."

They were days of silence in the bunk-house, days of drawn brows and unspoken speculation. Hard Ross lay upon a bunk made for him by swift, kind hands, at night in the warmest end of the sleeping quarters, by day, when the sun shone, outside. The little doctor from White Rock had come,

expressed himself with brief and profane emphasis at the iron body he was called upon to care for, grunted that a man like Ross didn't have to worry over anything less than a dozen bullets or a shotgun at close range, pocketed his fee, gave his simple orders and rode away not stopping to ask how his patient got hurt.

As he took his leave of Sherrod at the corral, answering the questions about the seriousness of Ross's injuries which Sherrod put to him, the little doctor with a sharp look in his eyes said quietly—

"I'll be back before long."

"You think that after all Ross——"

"Who said Ross? I noticed the general direction of the bullet holes in him," and he climbed into his cart. "Looks like they came from the south, the Bar Diamond way! There'll be more lead from the same direction, Mr. Sherrod! Giddap, Nig. We've got thirty miles ahead of us."

Yes, there would be more lead from the south, and Sherrod didn't care how soon. But first he must find those steers, find the broad trail which they must have left if after all Sunny Harper wasn't right about the up-to-date methods of cattle thieves, and fix the guilt where it belonged.

As the days ran by and brought no answer to the riddle, as Hard Ross got at last to his feet and walked a few steps about the bunk-house, Jim Sherrod felt in his heart a growing bitterness, a bitterness toward a woman. Dawn Madden knew something, guessed much more perhaps, and she had sent no word. She would rather be dead than have him lay his hand on her arm! And she lived on with Madden who was as deep in the mud as Plummer in the mire, or else had a lot to explain.

Sherrod had ridden several times to the Upper End. He had seen the strange dwelling place in which Madden lived his strange, solitary, luxurious life; he felt that Dawn must have seen him on at least one or two of his rides, and he had caught no glimpse of her.

"Evidently she'd rather be dead than see me, speak with me," he told himself every bit as savagely as the thought warranted.

Bull Plummer had stolen the fifty steers; the wet saddle blankets told their story of a hard night's riding; the fresh horses in the corral told their lie and made certainty more certain. Then, where were they?

The old question, over and over and over.

"It's enough to make a man go bugs," snorted Hard Ross just about as early in his convalescence as he was able to snort once more with his old-time vigor. "It looked easy to Sherrod an' he played it right, an' now what happens? Plummer's got his five hundred in cash he euchered him out'n, he's got as fine a herd of beef cattle as a man ever swung a rope over, an' the low-lived thief has got Silver Slippers! It's enough to make a man jus' ride over an' murder him, jus' for fun!"

Silence that agreed met Hard Ross's hard words. A very little thing would have been enough on a day like this to send a dozen lean, hard, wrathful cow-punchers swooping down upon the outfit which lay along their side, which took and defied and mocked.

Every time Jim Sherrod rode to the Upper End he saw, too, the dugout across the lake and frowned over it, wondering what part it played in the tangle of Madden's interests here. It was, for Dawn had told him that, upon the Up and Down property, and therefore it was Sherrod's and he had a perfect right to storm the thing and tear its secret from it. But, though tempted when his angry mood was upon him, he hesitated to do that. It would look like spite, and he failed to see what would be gained from it save the petty satisfaction of having annoyed a man he didn't like.

And one day, the thought coming to him swiftly, he thought that perhaps after all he could use this pawn in the game and force something from Madden's hand, could force Dawn Madden to speak.

He would do the thing which he did not want to do, he would call in that other law of sheriffs and court-rooms and long, meandering proceedings. He would trump up a charge against Madden; he would force Dawn into court; he would instruct his attorney to wring from her unwilling lips an account of her lighting the fire which so nearly shone upon the end of things for Hard Ross; and there might be a beginning, a something to show him the thing he sought.

With the thought upon him he rode straight to Madden's place. Madden himself, pale, his face drawn and weary, his eyes sharp and suspicious and watchful, met him at the door.

"Mr. Madden," he said quietly, "I want a word with you if possible."

"On business, no doubt?" retorted Mad-

den, standing in the doorway, making no move to come out or to have Sherrod pass in.

"On business."

"Pray, then," said Madden, "make it brief."

"I have lost cattle," Sherrod began; Madden cut him short.

"I haven't stolen them. I am not interested in them."

"But," went on Sherrod evenly, "you are interested. At least you know something of them, of who took them."

"You are accusing me of complicity!" snapped Madden. "If that is all that you have to say——"

"It isn't all," coolly. "It would be as well for you to listen to what I have to say."

"And that sounds like a threat!" Madden laughed a short, barely audible laugh which was scarcely more than a writhing back of the thin lips and a harsh grating from the throat.

"And I am not making any threats," still coolly, although Sherrod's anger found it a natural thing to rush out against this man. "I know who has taken my stock and I'm not making any bones about it. It's Plummer! And you know a great deal about Bull Plummer and his work. I want to ask you some questions, that's all. I want to know if that fire on the night Hawley shot Hard Ross and I shot Hawley was lighted by your orders."

"It was not," returned Madden.

"Miss Madden lighted it."

"Then hadn't you better ask Miss Madden about it?" sharply. "She is very much her own mistress, Mr. Sherrod."

"I shall ask her as soon as I can see her. Is she in this morning?"

"She is not in this morning," and Madden's tones irritated him again, seeming to mock him. "And she will not be in this afternoon or this evening!"

"May I ask when she will be in? Where she is?"

"Yes, you may ask and I'll answer. And it's the last question I will answer. She has gone away; she has been away a month. She will in all probability be away for a year!"

And he slammed the door in Sherrod's face, there was the sound of a heavy bar being dropped into place and Jim Sherrod went away, more puzzled than ever.

Dawn Madden had gone away, had gone shortly after that night when he had seen

her upon Daybreak Spire, no doubt. Gone where? To the city, to the East, where? No one would know but Madden, and to ask Madden would be to ask the cliffs standing tall and stony-faced about Madden's home.

"I might have known that she was gone," mused Sherrod. "It was the natural thing. Why should she stay in a country like this? Madden never did a more decent thing in his life than send her out of it!"

Musing, he turned away from the closed door and swung back up into the saddle. He had not said the things which he had come to say, and the reason did not lie alone in the fact that he had had the door slammed against him. It lay as well in the fact that Dawn Madden was gone and her going might make a difference.

He knew that once the law was called into this valley it would stay and it might hamper the free swing of his own action. And he would fail in the thing he wanted, an explanation from Dawn Madden of the lighting of that fire.

As had happened so many times before his questing, frowning eyes went across the lake and to the dugout. This morning in the bright sunlight it looked a flimsy thing which the breeze rippling the lake's surface might topple over. He wondered, as he always wondered when he saw it, what precious thing lay hidden within. And today, with a sudden impulse, he turned his horse from the man trail and rode around the head of the Upper Lake and to the cabin.

Madden had taken a shot at him the last time he came there; Madden would be watching him now. The man might shoot again, and in the daylight he might not miss the couple of inches he had missed before. But in his present defiant mood Fancy Jim Sherrod felt like taking any chance which might lead to any decisive action. He had loitered long enough.

He came to the cabin door and sat still in the saddle looking upon the outer, crumbling log walls. And his eyes, very keen now under the low-drawn brim of his hat watched too the Madden place, half expecting to see the nose of a rifle barrel.

And what he did see at the cabin itself was something which he might have seen a month ago if he had ridden here, or might have missed. A small, negligible thing, insignificant but given significance now because of its position and because of the

groping for any point in the tangle, no matter how small, by the mind of the man who saw it.

A soiled bit of paper such as a man would ride over and not notice; a piece of note-paper that had once been white, now darkened by exposure and the night dews. It was showing in a crack between two horizontal logs of the west wall, folded, just a corner showing, looking as though it had been thrust outward through the chink by some one inside.

"A note for Madden!" was Sherrod's quick thought. "It's got something to do with this infernal mix-up—and I'm going to tamper with the mails."

He glanced swiftly back toward the Madden house, from it to the paper. He could ride about the cabin, ride close to the wall, bend a little from the saddle, snatch the paper as he passed, and he did not think that Madden, were he looking, could see.

It might be nothing but on the other hand it might be the first small hint he wanted; its position bespoke secrecy if it were a note and that suggested something hidden that he had sought to know. He did not look again behind him.

He touched his horse with the spur, swung to the side along the cabin wall, snatched the paper as he rode past, and holding it close to his thigh, hidden in his palm, turned along the cliffs toward the Up and Down headquarters.

It was not until he had passed out of sight from the eyes which he was sure were watching him, hidden by hill and forest growth, that he looked at the thing he had found. And his heart leaped, grew still and his face went white. It was a note; it was written to him, Jim Sherrod; it was from Dawn Madden!

His name was at the top of the hastily scrawled sheet. The writing was in lead-pencil. It was already dimmed, but fortunately the folding of the sheet of paper bringing the note inside, had saved these words to him:

To be given to Mr. Jim Sherrod:

Plummer was with me. He had me by the throat. He said he'd kill me, kill you and Ross if I didn't tell you to go away. I was going to tell you all I know. Now—I'm afraid! They are going to get me out of the way—I don't know where. There is a cave, somewhere, 'way up on the cliffs. The Chinaman is to bring my food. If you don't get this before then follow him. He will leave at night. And be careful—they would kill you. DAWN.

And in his heart he had been blaming her! For a month, over a month, he had been telling himself over and over, day after day, that he was a fool to think of her as he had been thinking of her; that he was worse than a fool to remember how a wisp of golden-brown hair curved to kiss her cheek; how a sweet, maidenly soul stood tiptoe in her wondrous gray eyes. He had told himself that he was a fool not to see that she was hand in glove with Madden and perhaps Bull Plummer. And now . . .

And now he sat still in the saddle, his face white, his hand gripping the tiny bit of paper which only a great good fortune had brought to him, his hand shaking, a cold fear for her lying in his heart. She had written that just after he had called to her through the closed door, just after she had called to him, "I have nothing to say. Go away!"

More than a month had slipped past, and she had not come back. She had gone away, Madden said. Where? Not to the city, not of her own will. She had gone with Madden and Plummer threatening her, driving her, to some cave back in the mountains where she could have no opportunity of saying the things they feared to have her say. She had found out the thing that Sherrod had found baffling him. She knew their secret.

She knew their secret! A secret which might send both to the penitentiary or perhaps to the gallows. She knew. Was she still alive? A month had passed.

"The Chinaman is to bring my food! He will leave at night!"

"Then, tonight I will know!" muttered Jim Sherrod. "And if they've hurt her, I won't wait to find a lost steer to settle a long account with Bull Plummer. His hands on her throat!"

And riding swiftly, not because there was need for haste but because he could find it possible to wait for night by doing something, he shot down into the lower valley and sped to the bunk-house.

"Tonight," he told himself, looking impatiently at the high sun, "tonight will bring the beginning of the end. And pray God it finds all well with Dawn Madden!"

XIV



"IF SHE is still alive," and he shuddered at thought of what might have happened during a month of vain search on his part, a month during

which the gods of his destiny were good enough to save for him a note hidden where she had placed it, "if she is still kept prisoner here somewhere in the mountains, then the Chinaman still carries her her food. And I am going with him."

Fancy Jim Sherrod went about his preparations coolly. It was a crisis in his life of crises, and at such a moment it was his nature and his business to be cool. That was one very good reason why Jim Sherrod had lived to be twenty-nine.

In the late afternoon, but before the boys had come in, he sat in the bunk-house—he no longer found it necessary to remain aloof in his tent—and carefully cleaned, oiled and reloaded his guns. Hard Ross, the only man there, watched him with unveiled interest, making no remarks. And Sherrod went on about his business in his silent way.

When he had finished and had put the two heavy revolvers back into their holsters he made his cigaret with steady fingers, and his eyes went as steadily to meet his foreman's. For a moment the two men regarded each other searchingly. It was Hard Ross who spoke first.

"The holes in me are feelin' pretty good today, Jim," he said with no great expression in his slow tones.

He too reached for his tobacco and papers and again there fell silence in the bunk-house. Sherrod waited. Ross made and lighted his cigaret, inhaled deeply, leaned back where he sat and said in the same colorless tone:

"I can ride a horse a short ways, say fifteen or twenty mile, as good's I ever done, Jim. My hand's pretty steady, too."

He lifted his big right hand, the fist clenched, the forefinger pointing and squinted along it at a knot-hole in the wall as a man may sight a gun. The forefinger did not waver.

"It's your business, Jim," he said then. "An' I take you to be a man as knows his own business pretty well. But I got my word to say, remember that. I ain't got Silver Slippers back any more'n you got your steers. An'—oh,—!" he broke off sharply, his voice full of expression now, "Let me go 'long!"

Again silence. The two men smoked, sitting very still, their eyes now and then meeting, now and then turned to a falling ash or a glimpse of the creek seen through the open door. Slowly Hard Ross's face

began to darken, his eyes to grow gloomy. He knew what Sherrod's brief, careful preparations must mean and he began to fear that when an answer came to him it would be a curt negative. So his stern face brightened visibly when rising suddenly Fancy Jim Sherrod put out his hand in a hearty grip.

"I'd rather have you than anybody else, Ross," he said simply. "But are you sure that you are in shape already?"

"I'm real sure," grinned Hard Ross.

He got to his feet, tossed away his newly lighted cigaret and demanded in his short businesslike tone—

"We are ridin' real soon?"

"Before the boys come in," Sherrod told him. "Better look to your guns, Ross. We may need them."

"They've been kep' in real nice shape," Ross confided to him. And then, "We're ridin' in the general direction of the Bar Diamond?"

"Not tonight, Ross. But don't let that fool you. I am leaving word for the boys here to be ready for anything that happens. We're going to stir up a little trouble, I think."

When the cook came in to light his fire Jim Sherrod and Hard Ross went out and down to the corral, leaving the message for the rest of the boys. They roped a couple of the toughest, most spirited horses of the outfit, Hard Ross grinning at the memory of the many times he had roped Sherrod's horse for him, choosing a gentle one. Now as he watched Sherrod's rope swung far out to fall with a dexterity any cowpuncher would have been proud of, Ross grunted:

"A pretty fool I made of myself playin' you for a tenderfoot an' pickin' out a plow horse for you to straddle. Huh!"

Sherrod laughed.

"I was devoutly thankful," he returned. "I was afraid that you'd give me a wild one to watch the fun. I'd have had to get myself bucked off and——"

Hard Ross looked at him his eyes filled with regret.

"I wish I'd 'a' done it! Hones' to gran'ma, I wish I'd 'a' done it, Jim! It would almost of made it square with you for makin' a fool out'n me!"

They saddled, mounted and rode slowly toward the Upper End leading a third horse, talking lightly of things which did not matter. And the talk was largely Hard

Ross's. He had asked no further question; he wished to make no reference to the real business in hand until Jim Sherrod reopened the matter. And a sort of boyish glee possessed his spirit at the mere thought of being out on the trail again, at making a move toward Silver Slippers perhaps, at traveling toward a squaring of an old account with the Bar Diamond.

Only when they had ridden to Big Tree Meadow and so out of sight of the bunk-house and the boys upon the other rim of the valley, did Jim Sherrod tell his foreman what the errand was. At the first mention of Dawn Madden's name Ross's brows contracted. He had not forgotten the part she had played that night, how her action had abetted Hawley in his coward's attack. To his mind if she was not of Madden's blood still she was of Madden's kind; she had taken his name and had shared his interests. And Ross, too, saw in Madden a crook and an accomplice of Bull Plummer.

But long before Sherrod had told his story Ross's expression changed. It softened in pity as he muttered, "Pore little girl! She ain't no more'n a kid of a girl anyhow, is she Jim?" Then it hardened again with wrath, and his big fist clenched at his side.

"It's time Bull Plummer stretched a good piece of tie rope! Put his dirty hands on her throat, huh? Say, Jim," and his voice was suddenly harsh, filled with concern, "you don't reckon— It's been a month! You suppose she's all right, huh?"

Sherrod did not answer. He had been asking himself that question all day while he watched the sun climbing toward the zenith, while he awaited impatiently the lengthening of the afternoon shadows. She was at the mercy of such men as Madden, Bull Plummer and the big Chinaman! Could all be well with the Dawn Maiden?

"We've got to wait for dark, Ross," he said at last. "If they still have her captive and hidden somewhere among these rocks they must still carry her food to her. That means two things: first, that she is not far from Madden's, and second that they will wait for dark."

"We'll hang aroun' an' follow anybody we see leavin' the place?" offered Ross quickly.

"Yes. And," sternly, "if we don't see any one leave then we'll wait as long as we can. And when we have done that, why then

we'll go in and talk things over with Madden himself!"

In the security of the first hour of darkness they left their horses at the foot of the climb from the valley to the first of the lakes, tying the animals in a dense grove of firs a hundred yards from the trail. Then they went on on foot, walking warily, Sherrod leading, Ross at his heels, eyes and ears alike eager for news of some other person moving about them.

Upon the lake shore they separated.

"You move over that way, Ross," Sherrod whispered. "Keep to the edge of the lake, keep on until you come to the Upper Lake. Hide somewhere near the old cabin and watch."

"An' you, Jim?"

"I'm going to watch over Madden's place. If the Chinaman goes out tonight one of us ought to see him."

"If he should get by you?" Ross asked. "If I should see him first, then what? Am I to look you up?"

"You're to waste no time!" answered Sherrod. "You're to follow him and bring Dawn Madden back. That's what I brought you for. But I don't think that I am going to miss him! So long!"

"So long."

They had spent little time in planning for a night whose events they made no attempt to forecast. They would find Dawn Madden, if that were possible, and bring her away if they found her. They would go together, following the Chinaman, if Fate decided so to dictate; if they were separated each man would do what he could.

So Jim Sherrod went swiftly, silently, to watch over Madden's place while Hard Ross, crouching down in the shadows at the lake side, peered through the darkness at the cabin and the small cleared rock-floored space about it.

It lay in Fate's "cold deck" that both Fancy Jim Sherrod and Hard Ross were to follow the trail, the dim, hazardous trail that night to the Dawn of enlightenment and to the Dawn Maiden, and that they were not to travel it side by side.



AN HOUR passed. Intolerable stillness hung over the Upper End, broken only at rare intervals by the hoot of an owl, the sharp, snarling bark of a coyote or the call of a cricket upon the

mountain side. There was no wind to make noise in the tree-tops. The murmur of the water gushing from one lake, through its rocky channel to the other, had long ago blended so harmoniously with the silence as to seem now to be a part of it.

Hard Ross, where he sat, felt his eyeballs grow tired of trying to pierce a black wall which every moment grew blacker, thought longingly upon the cigaret he must forswear and solaced himself with a generous nibble at his plug cut. Sherrod, his lean body against a great cedar, watched and waited in growing impatience.

A second hour dragged by. Still no sound to tell of a cautious footstep in the darkness, no beam of light to tell of an opened doorway. A third hour went its slow way and Sherrod tiptoed away from his hiding-place and sought Ross.

"Seen anything? Heard anything?" he whispered when at length he had come almost to the cabin door.

"No," grunted Hard Ross. "Hadn't we better go talk with Madden?"

Sherrod hesitated. That was what he wanted to do; that would give them something to do beyond sitting or standing in cramped positions waiting for something which did not happen.

"I'd like to," he admitted softly. "But this is a waiting game, Ross. We might spoil everything. We'll wait another hour."

They did not wait another hour. Sherrod went back to his tree, Ross dropped down to his place in the shadows. And within fifteen minutes something happened—happened, was noticed by Hard Ross, was unseen, unheard by Jim Sherrod. For the big Chinaman had slipped out of the Madden place by some rear exit undreamed of by Sherrod, had moved stealthily through the trees and had come to the lake shore.

Ross heard him when the Chinaman was not twenty steps from where he crouched, saw his big bulk dimly outlined when he was not five feet away. And Ross, holding his breath, his every sense on the alert, his own footfall as silent upon the rocky shore as a cat's upon velvet, followed him. A fierce joy leaped up in Hard Ross's heart. At last he was to do his part.

Jim Sherrod, growing more impatient as each moment went by, forced himself to wait, telling himself over and over that it was too early to expect anything, that these

men would be more than guarded in what they did, that he might have to stay here until midnight. And then, before Hard Ross had followed his quarry ten steps, Jim Sherrod's lax frame grew suddenly tense, Jim Sherrod was following his quarry.

He did not at first know who it was that had stealthily opened the front door, having first turned out the lights within, and who now stepped out into the darkness. He could see nothing; he could just hear the soft whine of the door upon its hinges, the soft footfall of a man who went slowly and guardedly. And he followed.

"It's the Chinaman!" he told himself with a quick spurt of happiness. "He's going to her—and I'm going with him!"

The man who had come out of Madden's went very slowly at first. He stopped often and Sherrod knew that he was listening, looking, fearing that he might be seen, heard, followed. So, pausing every few steps, he made his way a hundred yards through the brush clinging about the boles of the great trees.

Then he stopped dead in his tracks, and for five minutes Sherrod could not tell that he had moved. The Up and Down man even began to grow restless, fearing that he had missed the man he thought he was following, dreading that he had slipped away to right or left, noiselessly.

Then the figure, dimly outlined against the surface of the lake, moved on. He was walking swiftly now. In a moment he broke into a run and Sherrod ran after him, keeping fifty steps behind. The man swung about the upper end of the lake; for a moment his hurrying form stood out against a star-silvered strip of the lake; then again it was lost in the thick shadows. A moment snatched from pitch darkness into semi-gloom, a hurrying figure, and Jim Sherrod could not be certain that it was not the Chinaman. It looked a trifle small for him, but he could not be certain.

The man he followed passed on swiftly now, without a stop, until he came to the cabin against the cliffs upon the far side of the little lake.

"Ross will see him too!" thought Sherrod. "We'll follow him together!"

He stopped a few paces from the cabin; he heard and half saw that the man before him was at the door, fumbling with the heavy lock, and in the short time allowed him Sherrod moved quietly until he came

to the spot where he had left Ross. He put out his hand. He saw what he took to be Ross's big body. He touched it and found that it was a tall stump of a tree. Ross was gone!

"He's near," was Sherrod's quick thought. "He's watching. He'll join me in a minute."

And then he gave his entire attention again to the man at the cabin door. Yet he wondered where Hard Ross was.

Evidently this man sought only to see that the lock had not been tampered with. With a little grunt which Sherrod heard distinctly, he dropped the short chain and turned away, his way leading along the base of the cliffs toward the pass leading into the Bar Diamond valley. And Sherrod, trailing this man with a stealth that was like a mountain cat's, with an eagerness which grew keener at each silent step, felt a swift joy leaping up in his heart that in a little this man would bring him to Dawn.

The trail was one that few men had followed, that Sherrod had never dreamed of. He had to stoop low to slip under a limb of a tree; he must now and then grope his way through the darkness on hands and knees, feeling his way. He could barely distinguish now the form he was following. Suddenly he lost it altogether.

Now he was close against the base of the cliffs, so close that he must walk more warily than ever for fear his clothes, brushing against the rough surface, might make just the wee sound that would tell the man ahead that another man trailed him. Now he felt that the trail was hard rock underfoot; that it slipped along the cliff wall, hidden by the growth of brush and tree; that it was climbing steeply upward. So close was the great, broad horizontal limb of a big sugar pine that he had come near stepping out upon it. Instead of the dark path following the ledge of rock, so close that it may have saved for a little the lives of two men, pursuer and pursued.

For the stealthy step of the man in front had disturbed a little stone upon the trail and it had rolled six inches and lay close to the edge; the quiet step of the man behind touched the same stone and, nicely balanced as it was, it went its noisy way down the cliffside, its racket breaking like thunder against the straining ears of both men.

The figure ahead, not twenty steps ahead, stopped before the stone had grown quiet in the shadows along the ravine bed below.

Sherrod stopped as quickly, his nerves taut, his mouth held open a little for his quiet breathing.

Absolute silence, a stillness as of death or the breathless suspense waiting for death, a stillness which was unbroken for ten minutes during which neither man moved.

And then, again the figure ahead was moving on, so softly that at first Sherrod could not be certain that he heard the almost inaudible footfall upon the hard path. But he was moving—and he was coming back! He was going to make doubly sure that he was not followed.

In the daytime two men could not have met and passed here. There was scant room for one. Jim Sherrod's mind leaping for a way out, a way to avoid discovery, at first saw no way. He could not move back, too, for he knew that his foot might strike another stone, that he might be discovered. He could tell that the footsteps were coming toward him more swiftly now, with less and less caution.

If he were discovered, what would be the end? It would mean that he had lost his chance to follow this man to Dawn Madden; it would perhaps mean a struggle on the narrow trail and an end of things for them both. Both men, locked in a death grip, might go plunging down into the rock-bed of the gorge below and neither man ever know who the other man was.

And then, thinking swiftly, he found the one chance and took it. The broad limb of the tree at his side invited him. He stepped out boldly, bending down, stooping low, clutching it with hands and knees, balanced a moment and then with no sound but the rustling of leaves which was lost in the faint rush of water below, he sat on the limb of the big pine, not two feet from the narrow trail.

And just in time. He could see the returning figure now, could hear the low breathing, and as the man came abreast of him, only a couple of feet away, he could make out who it was. It was not the Chinaman. It was Madden himself.

Madden paused again and stood leaning forward, peering into the darkness swallowing up the downward trail. Sherrod could have shot out a quick hand and plucked him from where he stood. Only for an instant did Madden hesitate here; then, hurrying now, making all the speed that he dared make upon so hazardous a way, he

was hastening downward, back along the way he had come. Sherrod heard his footsteps echo loudly until they died out and he knew that Madden had gone nearly back to the cabin.

"He's making sure," Sherrod told himself again. "He isn't taking any chances that aren't in the game. And he'll come back when he's convinced."

So he sat upon his limb, balancing, holding to the branches about him, drawing a little farther back from the trail, and waited. And in ten minutes Madden came back. He was walking swiftly now. He was making what haste he could and throwing caution to the winds, evidently in a very great hurry, evidently assured that it had been no human foot behind him to set the stone rolling.

"My luck's with me," muttered Sherrod as once more he set foot upon the trail, reaching out easily from his tree. "I know who I'm following now, and it's going to be easier to trail him now that he's making most of the noise."

He jerked off his boots, carrying them in one hand, and hurried on, unmindful of bruises and cuts from the flinty, sharp fragments of granite strewing the trail. He could hurry now, even! as Madden was hurrying, and with no grating of leathern sole on rock to whisper of his coming.

For fifteen minutes the way led straight toward the top of the Bar Diamond pass, climbing steeply. Then there was a little wider shelf, a sort of natural platform, and pausing here a moment Sherrod could hear Madden's footfall almost directly above him. For here the trail turned and wound backward along the cliffs, still climbing but leading in an opposite direction, away from the pass.

For another fifteen minutes Sherrod followed and now, two or three times, he saw Madden's form outlined against the sky above him. They were coming close to the top of the cliffs.

It was hard climbing now. The trail was scarcely more a trail than was that steep climb up to Daybreak Spire. Sherrod must grip at the face of the rock with his two hands, fastening his boot straps to his belt to have all his fingers free, must pull himself up where he had seen the blurred form of Madden go, must hold his body tight-pressed to the steep walls of granite, trying not to think of the sheer fall below him.

But where Madden had gone he could go, and he made his grim way uncomplaining. If he should only find Dawn at the end of the trail, if all were still well with her, no trail would be too difficult.

At last Madden had come to the top of the cliffs. For just an instant his silhouette was sharply defined against the clear sky; then it was lost again as suddenly as it had leaped out from the shadows. So quickly was it gone that, for a moment, Sherrod feared the man had fallen down into some gorge upon the other side of the cliff wall.

Then Sherrod came on swiftly, fearing that if Madden had not fallen at least he was lost to him among the boulders he expected to find strewing the ridge. But though he climbed with what speed he could, he moved with what caution was possible.

He drew himself up by his hands; he threw himself flat on his stomach and wriggled up to the spot where he had last seen Madden. He lifted his head a little and dropped back, lying flat against the rocks.

The leaping flames of a brush fire had startled him, the fire looked so close, the cliffs about were so bright with the quivering, rosy light. He had seen Madden again in that swift glimpse, had seen that the man he had followed stood upon a boulder upon the south slope of the cliffs, had seen the Chinaman, had seen Hard Ross, had seen Dawn Madden. And, background for the picture leaping into his startled eyes, he saw the wildest bit of the mountains he had ever seen, rugged, high-lifted spires and pinnacles of rocks, fathomless, sheer-walled gorges filled with shadows as a crevice with ink.

Madden stood upon a hog's-back, a spine of rock cresting the cliffs and of almost knife sharpness and thinness, with a straight drop to north into the valley of the Twin Lakes, a straight drop to south into a cañon a thousand feet deep. Here at the top it was a mere distance of twenty feet across the gorge.

It was across the gorge upon a flat surface perhaps a dozen feet square, that the fire was burning. The leaping flames showed the yawning mouth of a cave just beyond the level space, and Dawn Madden standing there. It showed a bridge running across the chasm, a bridge of one piece of timber rough-hewn from a log, not over three inches thick, less than a foot wide. One end of the narrow bridge rested upon the broad rock in

front of the cave, the other end lay upon a flat-topped boulder upon Madden's side of the chasm.

Walking swiftly across the timber which trembled under his fearless stride was the big Chinaman, carrying a parcel in his hands. He must give all of his attention to the placing of one foot before the other, and because he could not look behind him, Hard Ross was no longer seeking to conceal himself. He stood watching, stood at the brink of the chasm only a few feet from the Chinaman—only a few feet from where Madden was watching him.

Sherrod saw that Hard Ross had his gun in his hand now, that he was ready—ready for what? For whatever lay before him. And Sherrod saw that Madden too had a revolver in his hand, and that he was watching Hard Ross.

And Dawn Madden, seeing them all in the firelight, cried out—saw Sherrod as he rose swiftly a dozen paces behind Madden and threw up his hand—and clapped her hand to her mouth. He could see the look of terror in her widening eyes. He could see Hard Ross move out a little and knew that he was going to call to the Chinaman to throw up his hands. He could see Madden jerk up his right hand and knew that he was not going to call out, that he was going to shoot without warning.

And then, suddenly, Jim Sherrod sprang forward and downward, his hands going to Madden's throat, jerking him back to the ground.

"Cover the Chink, Ross!" shouted Sherrod. "Shoot him if he tries anything! I've got Madden. Don't take any chances now!"

"I've got him covered," Hard Ross's voice floated back to him coolly. "With two guns, Jim. I ain't takin' no chances. But—but I'm glad you come along, Jim!"

XV



MADDEN'S sharp cry, choked out of him, rang wildly, a bullet from his revolver winged its way over the top of the cliff on the far side of the gorge, and Madden learned what strength might lie in a pair of white hands as he was flung backward upon the ground, his gun jerked from his hand.

The Chinaman, already more than half way across the shaking bridge, leaped

forward as he guessed exactly what had happened behind him. Sherrod saw the parcel fall from the Oriental's hand, saw it drop into the nothingness which yawned hungrily below, and heard Hard Ross's voice booming out loudly in a short:

"Up with your hands, you Chink! Quick, or I'll let starlight through you!"

"We've got the drop on them!" was Sherrod's quick thought.

Then he heard Dawn Madden's voice in a terrified scream, saw her spring backward through the mouth of the cave, saw her snatch up a heavy blanket from the ground, and before he could guess her thought she had flung it over the leaping flames of her brush fire. Another blanket followed and another. This he could not see, for the first one had killed the light which had befriended him and Hard Ross. It was dark, pitch dark again. He could not see the form struggling in his hands, he could not see Ross or the Chinaman or Dawn.

"The devil!" shouted Hard Ross. "Are you crazy?"

In a flash the advantage had switched. The Chinaman was at the girl's side. The narrow bridge lay between them and Ross and Sherrod. Madden was giving Sherrod all the trouble he wanted. A raging anger leaped high in Sherrod's heart.

"She has double-crossed us, Ross!" he shouted. "Look out! God knows what we're up against!"

"An' the devil cares!" Ross yelled back at him lustily. "Can you manage Madden all right?"

"Yes. But——"

"Then I'll watch this little bridge here. I reckon they can't get out no other way. An' the firs' one as comes acrost is goin' to get dropped about a million feet into space."

There had come no word from Dawn. But it came now, in a strangling scream:

"I had to put out the fire! Plummer's here! He—oh, God!"

The scream died in her throat. There came a spurt of flame, and a bullet fired from a ledge of rock just above the entrance to the cave sang its way through the night over Sherrod's head. But he had understood; he knew the meaning of the strangling cry; he knew that either the yellow hands of the big Chinaman or Plummer's hands or the hands of one of Plummer's men were on her throat, that only her quick ac-

tion in throwing the blanket on the fire had saved him, and the thing he muttered into Madden's ear was full of menace.

Sherrod dropped to the ground, holding Madden's struggling body close to him. He had Madden's two wrists in his iron grip. He bent them back until they came together behind Madden's back. And then, as silently as he could, he dragged Madden with him toward the spot where a moment ago he had seen Hard Ross.

"You cry out," he hissed into Madden's ear, "and there's nothing left for me but to kill you! Be still!"

In a little of blind groping he came to Ross's side.

"Help me, Ross," he whispered. "We've got to tie him and jam something down his throat so he can't yell. Hurry."

Two belts and a couple of neck-scarfs did the business. Madden lay still now, his mouth pried wide open with a bit of silk trailing forth. Jim Sherrod and Hard Ross standing side by side, close to the end of the rough-hewn plank, stared across the gulf of darkness into deeper darkness, and tried to guess what happened a bare twenty feet from them.

"Plummer an' the Chink have got her," whispered Ross. "There ain't much chance on their troublin' us over here, but——"

"But," whispered Sherrod, "what is going to happen to her? Are we going to wait here until daylight to find out? There's bound to be some other way out of this. They'll be gone by morning!"

He broke off sharply. He did not like to think what might happen to the girl long before morning came. She had been hidden here for a month? Why? Because she knew something which Madden and Plummer did not want her to tell. Now, tonight, it had been her action which had saved Sherrod and Ross from Plummer's fire and Plummer's anger.

That note which he had found in the chinks of the old cabin wall had been a cry to him for help. He had come, he was almost at her side, and now she needed him if she ever needed him. Was he going to wait here, a bare twenty feet away from her, and let happen what might?

"I'm going over there to her!" Sherrod whispered into Hard Ross's ear. "It's taking chances, yes. But, God, man! What chances is she taking?"

And he gripped Hard Ross's hand hard,

hard, when the whispered answer came back to him:

"I'm glad it's dark, Jim. I always get dizzy when I can see down so far under me!"

Not another sound had come across to them from the far side of the chasm. But they knew that somewhere there Plummer and the Chinaman waited and watched. They knew that Dawn Madden's lips had been silenced, perhaps she had been only gagged—that they could not know.

"I'm goin' across now, Ross," Sherrod again was whispering. "I don't think that they'll expect it—so soon."

"I'm behind you," returned Ross quietly. "It's a fool thing but I guess it's the only way. An' Jim——"

"Yes?"

"If they jump you as you land throw yourself to the left. I'll shoot to the right. *Sabe?*"

Then they moved forward. Jim Sherrod, going first, went on his hands and knees until his groping fingers found the end of the plank. And then a quick thought came to him and he stopped.

He knew what one of the men would be doing upon the other side of the gorge, knew so well that it was a flash of inspiration. It was as if he could see the man. Plummer of the Chinaman was standing at Dawn's side, holding her, a rude hand over her mouth perhaps. And the other man? He would be lying stretched out on the ground at the other end of the plank. His fingers resting upon it would tell him the instant that a man set foot upon it. Sherrod had seen already how the slight bridge trembled and shook under a crossing foot.

"Plummer will be the one lying there," thought Sherrod swiftly. "He'd know the second I was crossing. He'd wait until I was half-way and then a quick shove to the end of the board and I'd drop a thousand feet! I'd be walking to my death with my eyes open, like a fool!"

He drew back, hesitating. He could not help Dawn Madden that way, and yet he must help her some way. Had she not suffered enough, alone, unaided, during the past month?

"What's the matter, Jim?" whispered Hard Ross. "Can't you find the plank?"

"Yes. Come here."

He drew Ross backward with him until the two men stood at a safer distance from ears to overhear them, and then told Ross

his thought briefly. Ross swore under his breath.

"That's their game!" he whispered savagely. "The low-down curs. And now what? It's wait until——"



IT HAD been dead still upon the other side of the gorge. Now, without warning, a revolver barked and spat, a red spurt of flame split the darkness only to be swallowed up by the darkness again, and the whine of a bullet told them that Plummer and the Chinaman were watching, listening.

"An' we can't shoot back!" groaned Ross as he glared back, his gun frozen tight in the grip of his hand. "We might hit her!"

"Meanwhile there's not a chance in a thousand of them hitting us," Sherrod answered coolly. "Here's a puzzle, Ross. What's the answer?"

"I'd give ten dollars for a cigaret," groaned Ross. "There ain't no answer."

But there must be! Jim Sherrod felt that she had called to him; that he had come so near; that he must find a way.

"If she hadn't put the fire out!" Ross was muttering.

"If she hadn't Plummer would have put a bullet hole in both of us," cut in Sherrod shortly. "For a second it was a mighty good thing for us that it was dark. Now if we had the light again—by the Lord, Ross we've got to build another fire."

"An' get picked off while we're scratchin' a match," grunted Ross. "I don't like it."

But Sherrod had his inspiration and he was acting on it without a moment's delay. He began groping along the cliffs for what dry brush, what bits of wood and grass, anything that would burn which he could find. Ross, understanding that he had made up his mind, followed suit.

It was slow work, what with the blackness of the night and the scarcity of any growth here upon the heights. But in fifteen minutes they had collected a goodly pile of combustible stuff and at Sherrod's low-spoken command Hard Ross helped him pile it.

Now, while seeking the material for his fire Sherrod had shaped his plan definitely, studying the ground as he went. Ten feet to the right of the near end of the plank was a big boulder standing close to the edge of the precipice. Moving silently, crouching low, he and Ross made the pile of brush-

wood just to the right of the boulder, just at the brink of the chasm. Then Hard Ross, grasping the plan, moved as Sherrod directed until he had gone another ten feet beyond the end of the plank where he crouched down in a little hollow deep enough to partly conceal his body.

Sherrod slipped behind the boulder and with his body hidden from Plummer and the Chinaman struck his match. A little dry grass served as a lighter. The flame broke out brightly, and he tossed the burning wisp to his bonfire, slipping back swiftly behind his rock.

There came a snarl from across the narrow ravine; he knew that it was Bull Plummer's voice and that Plummer understood, and then two revolvers, Plummer's and the Chinaman's cracked their warning as two bullets whizzed by the rock behind which Sherrod had withdrawn.

In a moment other dry grass caught fire, the twigs of the dead brush sucked at the twisting flames, and the firelight ran up as if it were following a powder train. A gleam of light cleft the darkness and showed the mouth of the cave. Dawn was not there. She had been thrust back through the entrance to be out of the way.

Plummer stood for a moment in sight, the Chinaman at his side. But before Hard Ross could fire both men had leaped a little to the side and the darkness befriended them again.

Now was the time Jim Sherrod had set for his action, an action full of danger but not impossible if he did not loiter. The big boulder against which his fire was growing every second, stood just between the leaping flames and the end of the plank; the end of the plank was still in pitch darkness.

He slipped about the boulder. Hard Ross, playing his part, opened fire at the spot where Plummer and the Chinaman had disappeared and succeeded in drawing their fire. And then Jim Sherrod, taking his chance, set his foot upon the most perilous bridge a man ever sought to travel.

He crouched low; he found the rough surface of the plank with his hands; he half straightened, waited one second until he could see before him, wavering and unreal, the way across the chasm, heard Ross's fire and the shots from the other side, steadied himself and started.

Ross was shooting with both hands and certainly making enough racket for two men

with two guns. There was no reason why Plummer and the Chinaman should suspect that Sherrod was crossing. He must travel that dangerous way slowly. He must edge onward, mincing step after mincing step as he balanced over the death below. He must come half-way, over half-way, until he was at the edge of the spreading circle of light, and then in one leap he must reach the far side.

"Good old Ross!" he muttered. "God bless him!"

For Ross was still firing like two men, and he was talking now, muttering things to Jim as if Jim were at his side, saying:

"A little more to the right, Jim! Keep down, Jim! Hurt bad, Jim!"

And Jim Sherrod was already very nearly half-way across the trembling bridge.

Almost half-way! A little more and he could straighten up take a swift step into the light and spring to the far side. He would take his chances then, but with the uncertain light, with Plummer and the Chinaman driven a little further back by Ross's fire, with the sudden dart he would make, throwing his body sidewise, into the darkness upon the other side of the cave, he thought that the chances were with him. Another three or four cautious steps and . . .

There came a shout, a shrill yell of warning—Madden's voice. Madden had somehow gotten the gag out of his mouth.

"Look out!" he shrieked. "Sherrod's on the bridge!"

And then Sherrod did not know rightly what happened. He ran now; he must run or a bullet would drop him. He did not know how far he had to go but the far brink did not look eight feet, and a bullet whizzed over his head and he jumped for it—leaped far out, throwing his arms forward, to fall sprawling, to feel his ankles strike upon the edge, to know that his body had landed safely.

He drew himself up. He twisted to the side. He half rolled, half crawled, straightened, and plunged into the shadows. There had come another bullet near him and he did not hear its whining song. For this bullet had not missed and he felt his left arm go nerveless and limp.

Madden had shouted again and again.

Then Sherrod had heard running feet, had guessed wildly that Madden had freed himself from his rude handcuffs and was rushing upon Hard Ross. He heard Ross

cry out. He thought that at last one of the bullets from the other side of the cave had struck the big foreman, and then he knew that Madden and Ross were struggling, swaying upon the brink of the chasm.

"My God!" cried Sherrod, forgetting his own wound. "He's hurt and Madden has struck him from behind. Ross! Ross!"

But Hard Ross did not answer. Dimly Sherrod descried the two forms swaying insecurely upon the edge of the cliffs. He dared not shoot; he could not tell which was Madden, which Ross.

Then again he heard a man cry out, a strangling, terrified scream. He could not tell whether the voice was Ross's or Madden's. And then—then there was only one man on the far side, drawing himself away weakly from the death which had caught the other man's slipping feet. Was it Madden? Was it Hard Ross?

But there was not time for a question now, not even the question of the death of friend or enemy. Sherrod heard the wild scream echoing through the cliffs, heard a body strike and fall and strike again, and already he was braced against a rock, his left arm useless at his side, his right hand gripping his gun and firing at the blurred forms of Plummer and the Chinaman. And he was firing slowly, carefully, with no thought of wasting lead.

The two blurred forms disappeared; he could not tell if his bullets had found their target or not. He waited and listened. He heard quick steps, the rolling of a stone; he thought that they were drawing back. And then he called sharply, half afraid of the silence which might answer him—

"Ross!"

And Hard Ross's big voice boomed back—

"All right, Jim!"

Jim Sherrod drew deep the breath of gratitude into his lungs. Ross was all right, Dawn was all right. He was "as good as new." And there was left nothing but a little clean fighting, with no odds.

He felt of his wounded arm with firm fingers. No bone was broken; there was only a severe but not dangerous wound through the bulge of the forearm. He picked up the gun which he had dropped, jammed it into his holster, gripped the other weapon in his right hand and turned his eyes toward the cave.

And then he saw Dawn Madden coming

swiftly toward him, saw her face deathly white in the firelight.

"Was it—Mr. Madden who—fell?" she asked faintly.

"Yes!" Sherrod cried. "But step back. They haven't gone yet and——"

She came on, walking steadily, still swiftly, standing out unhidden in the firelight.

"They have gone," she answered quietly. "I know."

She came on until she was close to Jim Sherrod's side.

"You have been good to me," she said faintly. "You have come to me when I needed you most. And—and I am sorry——"

Now her voice came to him faintly, hardly more than a shaken whisper.

"Sorry?" he asked, wondering. "That I came?"

"No, no," she told him quickly, seeking to steady her voice. "If you had not come——" She broke off with a shudder. "What might have happened. It is too hideous to think upon."

"Then you must not be sorry for anything," he said gently.

"But I must tell you, I must try to tell you, that I am sorry and ashamed—that I said I would rather be dead than touch you!"

And suddenly she reached out and lifting her two hands laid them upon his shoulders.

"I never understood," she told him swiftly. "How could I know such things? That there were men living whom another man must not think of mercifully? That there were men like Plummer—and Mr. Madden! You have been good to me, Jim Sherrod," she whispered.

His hands had crept upward, closing about hers on his shoulders, drawing them down.

"You poor little Dawn Maiden," he said softly in a voice grown husky.

"You must take me away with you," she went on quickly, with a frightened glance into the darkness about them. "I think I have nearly gone mad! I would go mad. You will take me away with you won't you? Oh, I know that they have gone. And I'll tell you all about it. I have so much to tell you."

Then because she seemed suddenly so little a Dawn Maiden, and because she was trembling, looking about to fall, and because

he could not help it, he caught her in his arms and held her close. Once before had he held her like this and she had flung herself shuddering out of his arms. But now—now Hard Ross was coming across the narrow foot-bridge and grinning broadly as he came.

XVI



THERE were two trails down, Dawn said. One led its steep way to the Bar Diamond, the other Sherrod and Ross had followed here tonight.

"We must hurry," she insisted. "Don't make me talk now, will you? I have so much to tell you, but you will let it go until we get——"

She broke off and turned away. Sherrod fancied that the word "home" was trembling on her lips. Home! What home was hers now?

"Until we get down into the valley," she went on bravely. "To your bunk-house."

She had slipped out of Sherrod's arms and stood leaning against the rocks, staring outward and downward. He saw that her eyes had been drawn involuntarily toward the abyss which had swallowed Madden; he knew that her thoughts had followed the wild plunge downward, and the little shudder he saw run through her tired body hurt him. But she had not mentioned Madden's name after being assured that he it was who had fallen; she would never mention his name again after she had told her story.

"Before we leave," she directed in a moment, "I want you to go in there and see the place in which I have stayed for a month. There is a lantern. I will wait here."

Sherrod went swiftly to the cave, found the lantern at the side of the wide entrance and lighted it. Hard Ross had come to his side.

"Hurt bad, Jim?" he whispered.

"No," Sherrod returned hurriedly. "And there's no reason why she should know."

Ross nodded. The two men turned their eyes into the cave as the weak rays from the lantern brought out the scant details. It was a rock-walled chamber some twenty feet deep, half that wide. It was perhaps six feet high at the front, not over three feet high at the rear. There was no sign of a chair or table; the only bed consisted of

the three blankets which Dawn had thrown upon the fire; there was no rug, no book, no single thing to give a little touch of comfort. Sherrod frowned as he looked, Ross cursed softly.

"An' they made her stay here a month! Pore little lady! What is it they were afraid of her tellin', Jim? About the cattle, huh?"

"We'll know soon, Ross." Sherrod turned out the lantern and came hurriedly out of the cave. "This is awful!"

Ross's hand was on his shoulder, Ross was whispering urgently—

"As soon's she begins, Jim, you'll ask her if she knows anything about Silver Slippers, won't you?"

"You saw?" Dawn asked gently. "It's nearly driven me crazy. I think they wanted me to go mad—or to die! I was alone; I was half starved. They gave me food and water only at night, and then not enough of either. And now, we must hurry before it is too late!"

"Too late?" repeated Sherrod.

"Yes! Come. I will tell you everything when we get down."

So they made their way back across the narrow bridge, Dawn Madden's hand held tight in Sherrod's as she walked behind him, Hard Ross coming across last.

"Draw the plank over this side," Dawn said then. "They can't follow us this way if you do."

Ross drew in the plank and they began their way down. Dawn's strength was not what it had been that other night when she hurried on down Daybreak Spire ahead of Sherrod, but she did not once complain and often led the way to show them the trail which she knew better than they. And yet it was an hour before they crept down to the floor of the valley at the side of the lake.

"Do you want to stop here and rest?" Sherrod asked.

"No, no!" she cried quickly. "There is no time; we must hurry on. I am afraid——"

"Of what?" asked Sherrod wondering.

"I'll tell you when I tell everything," she answered a little stubbornly. "And now, won't you hurry? Please?"

Then they found the horses where earlier in the night they had tethered them, Sherrod used one hand to help Dawn to the back of the animal they had brought for her, and they rode swiftly to the bunk-house. It was with the first dim streaks of the morning in

the sky behind them that they came into the home corrals.

Only a word did Dawn say then.

"While you unsaddle," she said to Sherrod as she slipped to the ground, "let Ross hurry on and wake the rest. I think you'll want all of your men to hear what I have to say."

Getting a quick nod from his employer Ross hurried away on his errand. Sherrod left the horses, still saddled, in the corral, closed the gate and he and Dawn walked slowly to the bunk-house.

It doesn't take a cow-puncher long to get out of bed and get his clothes on when there is the slightest need of haste. Before half of Hard Ross's brief order had been given blankets had been thrown off, bare feet had struck the floor, men were asking swift questions as their hands ran out for the garments scattered untidily upon chairs and floor. And when Dawn Madden and Jim Sherrod came to the bunk-house the door was wide open, the lamps were lighted, and the whole force of the Up and Down, tousled and unkempt, was ready to greet them.

The cook needed no prodding. He took one look at the girl's face, his shrewd eyes traveled to the boss's set mouth and hard eyes, and he built his fire and put on coffee and bacon with hastening hands.

A dozen hands were ready to make the girl comfortable. The best chair in the house was dragged forward dusted and examined for a treacherous, broken leg, odds and ends of clothing and general range riff-raff were thrust hastily out of sight under bunks. Men sought and donned coats to mark their respect and had equally little care as to ownership and fit of the garment into whose sleeves they thrust their arms. And Dawn Madden, smiling at them a little wanly, thanking them softly, dropped wearily into her chair and wearily began her story.

 "It has been going on a long, long time," she said. "For years, I think. I don't know how long. And, though I suspected Plummer I never suspected the whole truth until that night when I built the fire which nearly cost Ross his life.

"Mr. Madden—" they all noted that whenever she must mention him she called him Mr. Madden—"had me build the fire. I know now that Plummer told him to do it.

Plummer was at the house late that afternoon. I heard them mention Hawley, Silver Slippers, Ross. I did not think much of it at the time. I know now that Mr. Madden had me do it because he was afraid to do it himself, afraid that some one would shoot him. I don't know whether he was afraid of Ross or of Plummer."

"Of Plummer?" asked Sherrod curiously.

"Yes. He and Plummer have been side by side in all this thing, and yet I think that they distrusted each other. I know that more than once they have quarreled. I think that they hated each other. It required a great, mutual danger to make them sure of each other.

"Anyway, I made the fire. I saw Hawley's attack upon Ross, I saw Mr. Sherrod shoot Hawley, I heard Mr. Madden refuse to allow a wounded man to be brought into his house. I should have told everything then, but I knew nothing. I had only my suspicions. I was terribly nervous and I wanted time to think. Then, in the early morning, when I came back I came unexpectedly upon Plummer and Mr. Madden, I overheard what they were saying and I knew that during that same terrible night they had driven off fifty head of Up and Down cattle. I *knew* then what I had suspected; I knew that they were cattle thieves! And I learned what they had done with the stolen stock."

Every man there leaned a little closer to her at those words, every eye brightened perceptibly. There was a long score to settle, and this began to look like the time for settlement.

"I tried to slip away without them hearing me," Dawn went on. "I wanted to run back to Mr. Sherrod and to tell him. But they heard me; Plummer caught me and dragged me back; Mr. Madden threatened me. Then I heard Mr. Sherrod asking for me. I heard what Mr. Madden told him. I heard him come to the door of the room in which Plummer was watching over me.

"Plummer had his big hand on my throat. He whispered to me that if I did not send you away he would throw open the door and shoot you down—that he would kill Ross—that I would be forcing him to it. And, because there was nothing left to do, I sent you away!

"I knew then, with their secret in my hands, they would not again let me have an opportunity to get word to you. I feared

that they would do just the thing which they did do. So, in the little time I had while Plummer and Mr. Madden were in the hallway, talking in low whispers, I ran to my desk and wrote the note which Mr. Sherrod found last night."

"You slipped it between the logs of the old cabin as you went by?" asked Sherrod.

"Yes. I knew that Mr. Madden never went near the old cabin in the daytime and I felt that there would be little danger of him seeing it there. I hoped that you or one of the men would find it. It was the only thing I could do. And now for the thing I learned! I must tell it quickly; if you can come to the place before they do you will find your cattle there—every head. Oh, it was so simple a thing for them to do!"

She paused a moment, her face looking very white and tired. And then, her big gray eyes upon Jim Sherrod, she ran on quickly:

"I could have told you up at the Upper End, but I was afraid for you and Ross! We came right by the place; I knew that if I told you you would go to it alone, just you two. I was afraid that you might find Plummer already there and his men with him. I wanted you to come here first, to get all of your men to go with you. I am afraid that things have come to a desperate point. When you know all that I have to tell you it will be as if there were a rope around Bull Plummer's neck, a rope around the neck of nearly every one of the men taking his pay! They are not the kind to give in now without a fight."

Then she told them the last word of her story. The men looked from her to one another, their eyes widening.

"Gawd!" whispered Hard Ross. "We'd oughta guessed it a year ago!"

And ten minutes later Fancy Jim Sherrod and nine men at his back, was riding again the trail to the Upper End. Every man was armed, every man stern-eyed and ready for what might lie hidden by the new breaking day.

"An' me," Hard Ross grunted to himself with vast satisfaction, "I'm goin' to ride home on Silver Slippers, the ol' son-of-a-gun!"

XVII



THE sun was up, the lakes glistening with the fulfilled promise of the new day. The ten cowboys, riding swiftly, had come to the Upper End. Fancy Jim Sherrod, still a horse's length in the

lead, drew rein just before he came to the spot where the old cabin stood close to the lake shore. As if at a spoken command his men stopped with him.

"Boys," said Sherrod slowly, a little sternly, "I don't know what I'm leading you into this morning. I don't know whose saddle may go home empty. If any man of you dislikes the job, if any man of you doesn't want to take upon himself a part of another man's work, now is a good time to go back!"

He waited a moment. The cowboys who had followed him returned his steady gaze steadily. They had heard; they did not speak in answer but their eyes spoke for them. Sherrod turned a little in his saddle, looking from the first to the last of them.

"Thank you, boys," he said quietly. "I knew it. But listen a little, first. This is my game! I am playing it my way. And," his voice ringing sharp, grown more stern than before, "if any man of you is going to try to take it upon himself to say what shall be done, I don't want him. He can go back now! I say I am playing this my way. You are to do what I say or go back."

Still they made no answer, still their eyes held steadily to his. A month ago no man of them would have taken an order from Jim Sherrod at a time like this. This morning they were very content to "let him play his game his way."

"All right," he called curtly to them. "Now, stay where you are and keep your eyes open until I ask for you. Ross, Harper, Happy, you come ahead with the crowbar and axes."

As their names were called they shot their spurs home and their eager horses leaped to Sherrod's side. He too had ridden on. He had thrown himself from the saddle at the door of the old log cabin.

"Make short work of it, boys," he commanded. "Try the door first. It's lined on the inside with sheet-iron, but I think we can smash the door off its hinges."

Then they fell to their work with a will. The hush of the valley died among clanging echoes as bar and ax struck through the rotting planks and rang against the iron wall. In a little they had torn the heavy padlocks from their chains, twisted and broken the thick staples, wrecked the hinges, and the way was open. The door fell noisily.

"Now," and Sherrod was leading his

horse through the narrow opening, "come ahead. But no matter what we run up against don't start anything until I say so!"

His first glance into the cabin told him that Dawn Madden had made no mistake. The floor underneath was like the ground out in front, hard rock strewn with flinty bits of granite. The walls, three of them, were of sheet-iron. The fourth, the wall against the cliffs—there was no wall there! There was just a yawning hole into the rock through which three big steers might have passed abreast; there was just a sort of tunnel running back twenty feet and then . . .

Sherrod was again in the saddle; he had ridden through and a little cry of amazement broke from his lips. He was upon the rim of a tiny valley, a valley lying between the Up and Down and the Bar Diamond measuring some hundred yards across as the widest spot, being some five hundred yards long.

The cliffs rose straight about it on all sides, bare, barren, so steep that it was almost an impossibility for a man to climb them anywhere. There was nothing but rock and scant, drying, torn brush here; there was no grazing land for cattle. But there was straw; there were long troughs where stock could be watered; there was every sign that a large herd had fed here very recently.

"No wonder we never foun' this place," grunted Hard Ross. "Look up there, Jim! A man could never climb up anywhere from the outside so's he could look down on it."

"An' ol' Madden doin' the foxy stunt of buildin' that ol' cabin slam up against the hole in the cliffs," supplemented Sunny Harper quickly, "that made it as safe as a church! Think of him doin' that more'n twenty year ago, an' workin' his little ol' game off an' on all that time! The durned ol' pie-rat!"

"Anyway," and it was Ross again speaking as his quick eyes sought and did not find Silver Slippers, "Plummer's been here ahead of us an' has hazed the stock on out. There mus' be another way out."

"Through the ol' rock an' log corrals at the upper en' of the Bar Diamond!" cried Happy Day. "He's crowded 'em on through there."

"Come on!" called Sherrod. "They haven't much the head start of us. But keep your eyes open. Plummer will know we're trailing him this time. They'll be looking for us."



THEY rode hastily through the tiny, hidden valley, sweeping onward through the shadows flung downward by the cliffs a thousand feet above. And though their horses were racing now they had gone only a half of the way to the narrow exit five hundred yards away when they were given leaden assurance that Plummer was looking for them.

A rifle broke the stillness with its snapping bark, the echoes rolled like thunder among the cliffs, and the horse ridden by Mute Adams reared, screamed and came down with a broken leg. Mute swore, disentangled himself from his stirrups and rolled himself out of the way. Before he had ceased rolling or swearing, both Sunny Harper and Happy Day had thrown their rifles to their shoulders and had fired back at the shaking shrub and little puff of smoke hanging over the mouth of the exit. Then there was sudden, deep silence.

"Just a sharpshooter, more to signal to Plummer than anything else," decided Sherrod. "Sunny, you and Happy ride up in front with me, just the same. Take a shot at anything you see moving."

And again they swept on, Mute Adams running after them on foot, crying angrily for them not to leave him out of it, for one of them to take him up behind the saddle. Little John thoughtfully reined in a moment, Mute climbed up and the two of them riding a horse unused to carrying double, and trying at every jump to get its head down and buck them off, clattered along noisily in the wake of the race.

Where the way narrowed to the width of a small room, Sherrod again called to them, commanding that they let him go on ahead. This was his game, and when they saw the look in his eyes they remembered their promise and allowed him the required ten feet he wished to proceed them.

A narrow trail followed, leading its winding way through a steep cañon, climbing gradually, then dropping swiftly. And in a little they rode through a clump of trees, through a rude gate hidden by the trees and into the rock corrals.

And now a broad trail led unmistakably across the Bar Diamond, through the south pass there and toward the broken country beyond. The fifty head of steers had gone that way and not over a couple of hours ago. It was very plain.

"Think of it," muttered Hard Ross. "We

had 'em so scared all the time that they had to keep them fifty head in that little valley! Lord, it musta took a powerful lot of hay!"

He seemed to find a certain satisfaction in that.

"I think our way is marked plain enough for us now," said Sherrod thoughtfully. "Plummer chased down here as soon as he knew that Dawn Madden would tell her story. He got his men busy; they put every hoof on the run. There is only one thing which Plummer could do then. He'd have the stock run back into the broken country he'd have his men scatter them and leave them. It'll be a week's work for us bunching them and——"

"Look!" whispered Sunny Harper.

Further down the valley, riding slowly toward the Bar Diamond bunk-house, were seven men. Bull Plummer rode at their head.

"I thought so!" muttered Sherrod. "They've scattered the steers and have come back the roundabout way. And now what?"

"Now," spat out Mute Adams who with Little John had come up with the others, and who remembered a horse with a broken leg, "it's jus' make 'em come acrost!"

"Go easy there, Mute!" commanded Sherrod angrily. "You take orders from me, understand? Don't you see that they are ready for trouble? Three of them are carrying rifles, every man of them is armed. Why, man, it would take just about two minutes for a dozen saddles to be running empty! I don't want any wholesale murder this morning—if there is any other way," he muttered under his breath.

Plummer and his men had bunched a little. Plummer was now riding with a man on each side of him, and they were coming on more slowly, their eyes hidden yet by the distance. They were heading straight for the stable.

Sherrod measured the distance with his eyes; he saw that his party was a fraction nearer the Bar Diamond clutter of buildings. He formed his plan and shouting suddenly:

"Come on! Keep the barn between us and them. We get under cover first. Then we'll see what Plummer's got to say."

He jammed his spurs home, leaned low in the saddle and shot ahead toward the home corrals. His men, a few yards behind him, came racing after him, thinking that

they saw his plan only a part of which they had guessed. In a body they reached the corral, the big barn standing between them and the clatter of Plummer's party. They drew rein, heard a curse from Plummer, knew that he too had stopped.

"What you fellers want?" Plummer was shouting angrily. "I tol' you the nex' time you showed up on Bar Diamond property I'd chase you off."

Sherrod swung down from his saddle, left his horse with dragging reins and stepped out from behind the barn.

"You boys keep under cover," he said coolly, his voice carrying distinctly to where Plummer was waiting. "This is just between Plummer and me. If Plummer's men keep out of it let them go; it's just Plummer we want. If they are fools enough to cut it you boys can pick them out of their saddles! Steady now, Mute! Not a shot until they start it. Then give 'em lead!"

He had walked out into plain sight. Hard Ross groaned a little, took a step to follow, saw that every man of the Up and Down outfit was ready to forget his promise and go on after Sherrod, and then, his voice very hard, remembering that he was Jim Sherrod's foreman, he said sharply:

"Do what he says! He knows what he's doin'. But Sunny, you an' Happy get them rifles of your'n —— ready! Watch them two men on each side of Plummer. If they make a pass you boys get 'em fir's'."

"Stop there, Sherrod!" It was Bull Plummer's voice, full of menace, shaking with anger. "Stop or I'll drop you!"

Bull Plummer's gun was in his hand and rested upon the horn of his saddle requiring to be raised only a few inches to bring the heavy muzzle in line with the advancing man. Jim Sherrod's guns were in their holsters, Jim Sherrod's hands were swinging, empty, at his sides. And still he came on with the same quick even stride with which he had left the corral.

"You men," he shouted to Plummer's gang, "keep out of this! I don't want you! You can go—get out of the country for all I care and save your necks another year or so. Plummer," and the voice was as hard as the ring of steel on steel, the eyes stern and watchful, "you keep your gun down! I've got something to say to you."

"Say it then!" boomed Plummer. "Say it quick, or I'll kill you!"

"You won't kill me," coolly. "You'll

never get the chance and I think you know it. I knew that you were a thief all the time, Plummer; I think that you are a coward too. Now sit still and listen: I want back every head of those fifty steers! I want you to take your men and drive them back into the Up and Down. I want that five hundred dollars I let you cheat me out of. I want seventy-five dollars a head for every cow that has been lost to the outfit for a year. Then I want you to get out of the country! Easy, there, Plummer." He had stopped, not twenty short paces from the man; he could see Plummer's eyes now. "I don't want to kill you!"

"You want!" snarled Plummer. "Why, you — little dandy, I could——"

There came a sudden cry from one of Plummer's men, a man who had been at the rear and who now first saw Jim Sherrod very clearly.

"——!" he shouted. "It's the Painted Rock man! It's Fancy Jim Sherrod! Plummer, you fool, drop your gun!"

Fancy Jim Sherrod! Plummer's men were muttering the name among themselves. A hard smile came to Hard Ross's face.

"They know him now," he whispered. "They'll go powerful slow."

But into Plummer's eyes had flared a leaping rage.

"You little sneak!" he thundered.

The rest had happened like lightning. The men at Plummer's right and left, as if electrified by the menace in the mighty voice, jerked their horses aside, their spurs sinking deep and sending their mounts leaping to right and left. Plummer's gun was jerked up. Plummer fired, the bullets pouring from his automatic almost in a steady stream of lead.

Jim Sherrod seemed to fall, and only an eye as quick as light could have told that he dropped to his knee and went sidewise just before instead of a second after the first shot. As he went down his right hand sped on its swift, grim, certain way to his hip; his gun was in his hand; he fired once; he was on his feet again; he fired again; he jammed his gun back in its holster before Plummer's heavy body, falling, had struck the ground.

It grew very still. Plummer's men did not move; their guns hard in their hands, they waited for a shot from Sherrod's men. And they were as motionless.

For a long moment after the echoes died

down there was no sound save the creak of saddle leather, the jingle of bit-chains and spur-chains. And then the man who had cried to Plummer that it was Fancy Jim Sherrod, rode a little forward and threw his gun down.

"Plummer was a fool," he said colorlessly. "I tol' him to drop his gun." He shrugged his shoulders and felt for his tobacco. "What's the use a man jus' committin' suicide that away, huh?"

"Plummer isn't dead!" said Jim Sherrod swiftly. "Pick him up, some of you men. Lay him in the shade by the corral there."

"You mean," gasped the man who had thrown down his gun, "that you missed? That close, two shots an' you didn't kill him? Say, you are Fancy Jim Sherrod an' I know it. Then what's happened to you?"

And of all the men who heard Fancy Jim Sherrod's quiet answer Hard Ross was the only one who fully understood.

"Maybe the light was in my eyes," he said coolly. "If he is alive now he can thank dawn for it!"

XVIII



JIM SHERROD had played his game his way and the fight was over.

Just three shots from Bull Plummer, just two from Sherrod, and the men who had followed Plummer so long and who now saw him twisting in an agony of pain on the ground were done with him. Plummer was not a man with a personality to call upon other men for warm friendships; their relations had been purely the relations of crooked business. Now the crooked business was at an end. Sherrod was willing to let them get out of the country; he wanted only his stock back, they wanted only to move on.

Slowly revolvers went back into their hidden places, rifles were laid over saddles, and two men, swinging down, lifted Bull Plummer and carried him to the shade lying along the corral fence. And they saw that the light had not been too bad for Sherrod's bullets to find right and left shoulder, and to put Plummer where his nerveless hands could no longer hold a revolver.

"There's jus' one thing, Jim," Hard Ross was saying, his eyes troubled. "While we're here——"

"Silver Slippers?" cut in Sherrod quickly. "I haven't forgotten her, Ross."

He turned to the two of Plummer's men standing at Plummer's side.

"Where is Ross's mare?" he asked point-blank.

"She's a devil!" grunted one man shortly. "What a man wants with the like of her——"

"She's the fines' little mare ever put a clean foot on a dirty range!" flared up Hard Ross angrily.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Plummer was crazy about her," he retorted. "He always was crazy about a pretty horse, same as some men about a pretty woman. He made Hawley turn the trick an' paid him han'some for it. An' a lot of good it done Plummer, an' while he —— near killed her he never rode her more'n seven jumps at ——"

"Plummer —— near killed Silver Slippers!"

Hard Ross's voice was suddenly so low that the man nearest him hardly heard it: Plummer, where he half sat, half lay against the corral, turned quick, widening eyes upon Ross, for Plummer had heard and he had understood the emotion making the low tones husky.

"Go look at her," laughed the man offering the information. "You'll find her hide pretty near cut to strips—not with a spur, seein' he couldn't stick on her long enough—but with a whip! An' when he was tired beatin' her an' she was all trembly in them thin legs of her'n she'd whirl an' try to beat his head off with her hoofs."

"Where is she?" snapped Hard Ross, his lean fingers sinking deep in the man's arm so that the fellow winced.

"I didn't touch the dirty outlaw," he snarled. "She's in the stable."

Ross flung him away and strode toward the stable, throwing the corral gate wide open and leaving it open. Sunny Harper, standing near the stable, opened the double doors. And Silver Slippers, her dainty silken hide cut with the merciless bull-whip which had worn deep into her delicate body and had never reached the unbroken spirit, flashed out into the corral, her eyes wide with terror and hatred, her nostrils distended, her fine ears pricked up, her proud head lifted high upon an arched neck.

"Silver Slippers!" cried Hard Ross, his voice breaking a little.

But she did not see him, she did not hear now the voice which she loved above all other sounds in the world. She saw the open corral gate, she scented liberty with her

flaring nostrils, she flashed through. And as she went, like some glorious creature bred of the morning, all fire and life and leaping pride and tameless strength, she saw Bull Plummer against the corral fence—and she remembered.

Men leaped out of her way, some one crying shrilly:

"Look out! She's a man killer!"

Plummer saw and settled a little to one side, trying to draw back, his eyes full of terror. But Silver Slippers struck, struck once, hard and mercilessly, with her forefeet, wheeled, shot out her hoofs unerringly. And more than one man, used to the things of a hard life, involuntarily covered his white face with his hands. Then Silver Slippers had gone, her racing blood leaping, speeding back home, and Bull Plummer had paid to the uttermost his long score.



THE missing steers once more grazed on the Up and Down, the boys stood out at the corrals smoking and talking quietly, and Hard Ross in the stable, his eyes very tender, was putting liniment into the cuts upon Silver Slippers' shiny coat. The liniment burned, the tender flesh twitched under it, but Silver Slippers did not draw back from the man she trusted in all things. Her soft nose rubbed gently against Hard Ross's side and her eyes, too, were tender.

At the bunk-house door Fancy Jim Sherrod and Dawn had grown silent, as silent as the dusk creeping down through the valley. A moment ago and he had been speaking with a forced lightness, seeking to draw the girl's thoughts away from those last days of tragic things. To get her mind as far away as might be from Plummer and Madden and Hawley, he had spoken of the city.

"You'll be going back soon now," he had said.

And then it had been that he broke off and went to the door, staring out with darkening eyes, and the deep silence fell upon them.

Almost, in the bitterness of his thoughts, he had forgotten the girl herself who had inspired them; he was thinking of tomorrow and the days beyond it, and he sensed how empty they were going to be. But now she was at his side; at last she was speaking softly.

"Hard Ross has told me all that happened when you came up with Bull Plum-

mer," she was saying, and Sherrod turned a little to look down into her uplifted face. "I know why you didn't kill him. I know why you risked your life, just wounding a man when you might have shot him dead, a man who was even then seeking your death. For Ross told me the thing which you said when they asked you why you spared him!"

He turned his moody eyes back to the line of willows following the crooked wanderings of the valley creek.

"You should never have come in touch with a life like this, nor with a man like me," he said thoughtfully. "It is a hard life; it makes hard men. If in some little thing you can feel that I am not the brute you thought——"

"You are the kind of man this country needs!" she cried quickly. "Today another man than you might have brought about the deaths of many men. You might have killed Plummer—justly! And you spared him. I have seen that you can be hard when there is the need. I have seen that you can be gentle, very gentle with a horse, with a woman——"

Now, suddenly, the moodiness was gone from Jim Sherrod's eyes before the brightness in Dawn's.

"Dawn," he said quickly. "Dawn—play fair with me, Dawn!"

"Play fair with you?" she asked, puzzled a little.

"I mean," he told her with a strange sort of fierce tenderness in his low-dropped voice, "that you mustn't look at me like that unless——"

"Unless?" she repeated after him, challengingly, her voice steady, her eyes steady upon his.

She had lifted her head a little and held herself erect, her chin raised slightly, her deep gray eyes low-lidded and cool. And yet, despite the clamminess of her attitude, slowly her face went crimson.

Again were they silent. But now the silence was not like that that marks the coming of the dusk, but rather that glorious still prelude to a golden daybreak.

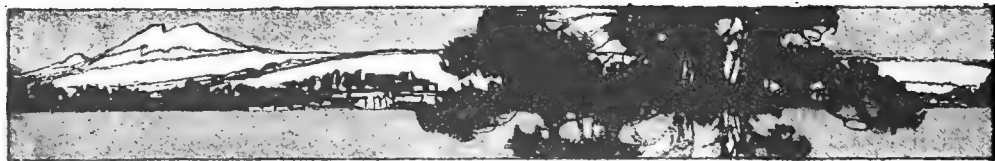


"SAY, Harpie," Happy Day was saying thoughtfully, "ever notice that look in ol' Ross's eyes when he's alone with Silver Slippers and don't know anybody's lookin' at him? Just' like a man with the only woman."

"Look up to the bunk-house," Sunny Harper chuckled. "At ol' Fancy Jim! Don't it sorta remind you of the way Ross looks at Silery Slippers, huh?"

Well, after all, as Hard Ross had said—

"There is jus' one thing in the world as counts!"



On the Strength of the Evidence



M. S. Wightman

Author of "The Abduction of Swain," "The Letter of the Promise," etc.

AT RUSHMORE'S entrance a vague restraint fell upon the room.

We were on the army transport *Grant*, five days out from Nagasaki, en route to San Francisco via Honolulu. Following our usual custom, we had after dinner gone to Major Pierce's cabin for our cigars—four friends whom the voyage had thrown together.

In a corner at the foot of the berth, Mapa, Pierce's native servant, was squatting on his heels, a fresh blouse on which he was putting buttons spread over his knees.

Captain Brock, who wore the star of the General Staff, was commenting on the day's run, when the door opened abruptly, and Captain Rushmore entered, pushed his way between Pierce and myself, and dropped into a vacant chair across the circle from Lieutenant Wring. It had been evident at dinner that Rushmore, in spite of the order prohibiting intoxicants on board transports, had been drinking, and that no doubt accounted for his thrusting himself into a party of which Wring was a member. There was bad blood between the two men, dating months back to some attentions which Rushmore had shown Mrs. Wring. No one except the parties concerned knew the details.

It was known, however, that late one night Rushmore had sent for the post surgeon to dress a couple of nasty cuts on his cheek; and that the following day Wring had

gone to Colonel Winters, their commanding officer at Polangan, and demanded that the captain be transferred. After a couple of days in his quarters, Rushmore had left for detached service in Manila, and the two men had not since met until their regiment had embarked on the *Grant*. Incidentally Mrs. Wring was not on the ship, having returned to the States some months before.

To break the silence which followed the captain's entrance, Pierce began to talk of the last polo tournament.

"The Tenth won the cup, didn't they?" he asked. "I went South before the finals and did not hear after my return."

He was told that they had; and there naturally followed a discussion of the playing of the various teams. Rushmore was leaning back in his chair, his eyes watching the smoke rings he was blowing, his thin lips set in a self-contented smile. He seemed in one of those humors characteristic of drinking in which a man amuses himself with his own cloudy fancies, oblivious to what is going on around him.

Presently, without changing his position or losing his smile, he cut in on the conversation.

"Yes, the Tenth won because our team had on it a quitter. I won't mention names, but he played number two, and in the last game he laid down like a yellow pup."

No one spoke; Wring had played number two, and in the last game he had been a

regular demon, head and shoulders in his work above any man on the field. Now he glanced up and rested his eyes on Rushmore, as if uncertain whether or not to let the remark pass; but after a moment he sank back with a shrug and smiled indulgently at the rest of us.

"Suppose we take a walk, Rushmore," said Captain Brock, who was sitting next to him.

Rushmore turned on him with a smile of drunken cunning.

"No you don't," he said. "Pierce asked me to come up any time I wanted; and now I'm here I mean to stay. If any one else wants to run away, they have my permission."

"Pierce didn't ask you to come up and make trouble. If you stay, see that you keep a civil tongue in your head," snapped Brock.

He was a small, round-faced man, with blue, innocent-seeming eyes; and despite the fact that they were almost the antitheses of each other, a great crony with Wring. For Brock's guileless face was misleading; he was a very deep reader, and although still in his thirties recognized as an authority on strategy and tactics, on which subjects he had written numerous books.

Wring, on the other hand, cared nothing for intellectual games; his fetish was sport. His dark eyes and sallow skin evidenced his impetuous, passionate nature; but he had schooled himself to almost perfect self-control. His intense admiration for Brock's accomplishments had led to their friendship.

"Tommy is a wonder," he often said. "If I had only a tenth of his brain I'd quit the army and become President."

While Brock had been heard to remark—

"If I only had that boy's sand and self-control, I'd have been a general at thirty."



RUSHMORE did not reply to the rebuke. Instead he slouched down more deeply in his chair, and frowningly studied the lighted end of his cigar. The conversation switched from polo to personalities. We began to tell stories, Pierce leading the way with an account of an experience in which a datu in the hills back of Penang had largely figured.

Rushmore seemed to have returned to his castle-building, smiling and apparently oblivious to the rest of us. But from where I sat his profile was plainly visible, and once

I saw him, without changing his position, shift his glance to Wring and then back to the ceiling; and I suspected that he was bent on making trouble.

Brock followed Pierce's narrative with a story in which he had played the part of amateur detective in recovering a lost paper at Fort Santiago. At its conclusion he rose and tossed his cigar-butt into the ash-receiver.

Rushmore drew in his legs and sat up.

"Don't go, Brock," he said. "I want to tell a story, a peach of a story, none of your datu and detective stuff. This one has a woman in it, a woman who was crazy about me."

From Rushmore's tone and the smile which accompanied it, no one doubted what that story was to be.

Brock stiffened, while Pierce leaned forward and dropped his hand on the captain's knee.

"We have had enough stories tonight. What was the name of that book of which you were speaking at dinner?" he asked in an effort to divert his attention.

Rushmore petulantly pushed off the hand.

"That's not fair," he said complainingly. "I listened to your stories: you've got to listen to mine. Besides mine is more interesting. Sit down, Brock. It happened at Camp Jossman."

Since Rushmore had come into the room, Wring had not spoken; now he lifted his eyes to the captain's.

"I don't think you want to tell that story," he said.

His voice was level; but, as I glanced at him, I thought I had never had an impression of more intense anger under control.

If Rushmore had not been maudlin with drink, he would have been warned by Wring's expression. As it was, he seemed to have taken enough to unbalance, without stupefying him. Whatever that trouble had been, he must have played a humiliating part in it, and the memory rankled. No doubt this accounted for his recklessness. With a jeering laugh, he turned to the crowd.

"He don't want me to tell it, because, you see, it was about his wife. She pretended not to care, but you can't fool me—she was crazy about me. She told him I was annoying her, but that was a bluff."

"You lie, you coward, you know you do!" exclaimed Wring.

He sprang for Rushmore, and we sprang for Wring; but before we pulled him off, he had stretched the other man on the floor. For a few minutes the three of us struggled to hold him—he was mad with rage and possessed enormous strength—while Brock tried to quiet him by repeating:

"Never mind, Tommy. He's drunk. He'll apologize in the morning."

And then, as suddenly as he had given way, he controlled himself.

"I am all right now," he said, and without glancing at Rushmore left the room.

Half an hour later we brought the captain to. The shock had sobered him, and he seemed only vaguely to remember what he had done.

"Was I very bad?" he asked Pierce.

"Well you weren't pleasant," returned the major. "I think if I were you I should apologize. And I wouldn't take anything to drink if it was going to make me behave like that."

Rushmore dropped his head remorsefully into his hands.

"I will apologize in the morning. I've been a cad all the way through, and he's been white; that's what makes me mad. But it wasn't altogether drink; I hadn't taken a great deal; just enough to upset me. It was chiefly insomnia. I haven't been sleeping for weeks, and my nerves have simply gone to pieces."

He raised his head and his glance fell on Mapa, who, forgotten by all of us, had been squatting in his corner. He was a wild, truculent looking little savage, a Moham-medan from the Moro Province, who, Pierce said, was rapidly developing into a quiet, inoffensive servant.

I doubted it. My own boy, Juan, had told me stories of Mapa's temper and sly craftiness which seemed more in keeping with his coarse black hair, standing upright like bristles over his head, his flat nose, thick lips, and bare feet which had never worn shoes.

Rushmore studied him for a moment, then shook his head while he frowned.

"Insomnia is hell," he said. "It certainly brings out the worst a man has in him."

"I'll give you something to put you to sleep, if you wish," said Pierce.

"You will?" cried Rushmore eagerly. "My Lord, man, if you can let me have it! If I can get only one night's good, sound sleep!"

The major sent Mapa below for a pitcher of ice-water; and when the boy had returned with it, he took from a traveling medicine-case a powder which he poured on Rushmore's tongue.

"Now go to your cabin and turn in. I guarantee you will be asleep in half an hour, and that nothing short of a boiler explosion can wake you before morning."

"Not even a burglar?" asked Rushmore in an attempt at playfulness.

"A burglar could crawl all over you and you wouldn't know it," returned Pierce. "If you expect one, you had better lock your door."

Rushmore departed, and shortly afterward Brock went below to see Wring, whose cabin was on the main deck.

I was in our own cabin when he came up.

"Wring's still mad, with that cold fury of his," reported Brock. "He's hard to rouse, but when he does let himself go, he's a perfect fiend. Rushmore is a fool. He is playing with fire taunting that boy. Peel, I am afraid something tragic is going to happen before this voyage is over."

Whether it was the excitement of the evening, or Rushmore's suggestion of insomnia, but long after we had turned out the light I could not sleep. I lay tossing from side to side, listening to the steady, pulsing throb of the screw and the deep breathing of Brock in the berth above me, until I could stand it no more; and slipping on a dressing-gown and rubber-soled shoes, I opened the door and passed out on deck.

It was a pleasant, fresh night, with a quiet sea which fell splashing away from the ship's side without moving her from an even keel. Except for a small light over the entrance to a companionway leading to the main deck, the upper deck was in darkness; and I began to circle it, keeping close to the rail to avoid chairs.

Presently, on rounding the after part, I caught sight of a figure in the shadow cast by the light forward. Before I reached it, the figure had stepped forward into the light, turned down the companionway and disappeared. It was Lieutenant Wring.

Rushmore occupied one of the single cabins on the fore part of this upper deck and Wring had come from that direction. At the time I gave this fact no thought, merely considering that he like myself had been prowling about the ship in search of sleep, and was returning to his cabin.

But the next morning the incident, which at the time seemed trivial, assumed a startling importance.



IT WAS well toward noon, and Pierce and I from our deck-chairs were watching the long, bluish-green roll of the mid-Pacific, when Brock approached us. His face was grave, and I noticed that he was nervously opening and closing the fingers of his right hand.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked in a low voice, and when we replied that we had not, he said:

"Rushmore was killed last night. His cabin steward has just discovered the body. He was lying in his berth and had been stabbed ten or a dozen times."

In that instant there flashed to my mind a picture of Wring in the light at the head of the companionway.

No one spoke for a moment; I suppose we were all mentally reviewing the scene in Pierce's cabin the night before. Then the major, passing his hand across his forehead, asked—

"Have they discovered the weapon?"

"No," said Brock, "it was evidently a knife, but it has not yet been found. It seemed to have a queer, curving blade."

"Poor Mrs. Wring!" murmured Pierce.

Brock whirled on him quickly and started to speak. But apparently he thought better of it, for he checked himself, and after a moment added quietly:

"The colonel is holding an inquiry immediately after lunch. I suppose he will want you both there."

He departed; and after staring absorbedly at the sea, Pierce turned to me.

"She is a splendid girl and wrapped up in her husband. How could he have done such a thing?"

"You think, then, that Wring did it?" I asked.

"Certainly, that is obvious," replied Pierce.

I do not know when Wring learned that Rushmore's body had been found; but his face, when we had gathered in the colonel's room that afternoon, was a perfect mask. The faces of such men usually reflect only the strongest emotions; but although he was sitting directly in the light of an open, unshuttered window and I studied him closely, I could not tell whether he was feeling remorse, or fear, or perhaps a certain

exhilaration. If he knew that he was under suspicion, he gave no sign of it in his manner.

In addition to Pierce, Brock and myself, Colonel Winters had summoned the quartermaster, Captain Fullam, and the ship's surgeon, Dr. Munroe.

The colonel looked older than his sixty years. Years of service in the subordinate grades, and the dull, monotonous life of garrison duty at isolated posts, had sapped his initiative and dulled his enthusiasm. He was no man to have the handling of a case like this; and it soon became evident that he harbored a feeling of bitterness toward Wring. Rushmore had been a great favorite with him.

"It is a sad duty which brings us here, gentlemen," he began in a high, nasal voice, which he strove to make melancholy, but only succeeded in making resentful; and he continued in this strain, until Brock, taking advantage of one of his pauses for breath, suggested—

"I believe the doctor is ready to report, colonel."

For a moment Colonel Winters glanced at him as if uncertain whether or not to take the interruption as an impertinence; but in his heart he felt a certain awe of the captain with the boyish face. He turned to the doctor, and said—

"Yes, doctor, we will hear from you if you please."

The only salient facts brought out by the doctor's testimony were that the crime had been committed during the night, for *rigor mortis* had set in long before the discovery of the body, and that the assassin had been extraordinarily vindictive. There were more than a dozen wounds, of which two-thirds were in vital parts. This fact alone, disregarding the disappearance of the weapon, precluded the theory of suicide.

When the doctor had concluded, Pierce, at the request of Colonel Winters, gave a very fair account of what had happened in his room the night before. While not actually trying to shield Wring, he made no point of the lieutenant's rage which had been so noticeable.

Colonel Winters tugged nervously at his mustache; then he let his eyes rest on Wring.

"Lieutenant Wring, what have you to say in regard to this matter?"

Wring met his glance steadily.

"I know nothing, colonel, which Major

Pierce has not already told you. The last time I saw Captain Rushmore he was lying on the floor where I had thrown him before I was overpowered."

"You did not—" the colonel cleared his throat, "you need not answer unless you wish. I believe that is the law is it not, Captain Brock? You did not, as I say, return to your cabin and brood over your insult, and then make up your mind—in short you did not steal up to Captain Rushmore's room."

"Sir?" broke in Wring. He was leaning forward now, concentratedly gazing at the colonel.

But Colonel Winters stumbled on.

"As I say, lieutenant, I believe I can not compel you to answer; but as your commanding officer, I would advise—that is I would——"

"Surely, colonel, you don't mean to insinuate that I killed Captain Rushmore," said Wring in a voice which he strove hard to control.

"Well, Mr. Wring," replied Colonel Winters, somewhat peevishly, "I can only be governed by the evidence; and that I think is plain enough."

For a moment Wring stared at him without speaking; then his glance traveled to the rest of the company, searching each face in turn. And slowly his look of angered surprise gave way to one almost of horror.

Suddenly he turned to Brock, and in a voice shot through with pleading, exclaimed—

"You don't believe that, do you Tommy?"

Brock did not reply. He only lifted and dropped his hand in a gesture which might have meant anything.

Wring sank back into his chair and stretched out his arms.

"My God! You fellows don't believe I would do a thing like that! Haven't I eaten with you, and played with you, and soldiered side by side with you, don't you know me yet? I could have killed him last night when I had him down, while my anger was hot and he had a chance to defend himself—but to creep up and knife him while he was asleep! Surely you don't believe me capable of that?"

A silence followed Wring's outburst, a silence which was broken only by the faint creak of a chair as some one uneasily shifted his position. Despite the plainness of the

evidence, there was a convincing note of sincerity in his tone. For the moment I forgot the episode of the deck; I believed him innocent.

Colonel Winters at last broke the silence.

"I take it then, lieutenant, that you mean to deny it," he said.

Wring dropped his arms and lifted himself in his chair. The mask again fell upon his face. His appeal had been unheeded; he had been judged and condemned. For an instant his eyes rested on Brock, and in them I saw a look such as once must have been seen at the great betrayal.

"Yes, colonel," he said quietly. "I mean to deny it because I did not do it."

Colonel Winters turned to the rest of us.

"Do any of you," he inquired, "know anything bearing on the case, which has not been brought out?"

It was the moment which I had been dreading. Should I or should I not tell that I had seen Wring come from the direction of Rushmore's cabin after midnight when the deck lights were out, and slip quietly down the companionway? If I kept silence I might be shielding a crime; if I spoke, it might prove the decisive piece of testimony in the case against Wring; and while it seemed that he must be guilty, I sympathized with him. I had witnessed his provocation, and I knew his passionate nature.

Perhaps as I debated with myself I stirred in my seat, for suddenly he looked toward me and our eyes met. He could not have seen me the night before, for I had still been in the darkness when he disappeared; but by that little-known process of telepathy, he realized that I had seen him and was hesitating to speak of it. He smiled slightly, as if in appreciation of my hesitation, and turned to the colonel.

"I think Mr. Peel has something to tell you," he said.

There remained then nothing but to tell of my sleeplessness and its consequences. He explained his presence by saying that he, too, had been unable to sleep; and after pacing the lower deck, the ladder leading to the one above had caught his eye, and he had climbed it. Why he had immediately returned below on reaching the companionway, he did not know. It had been simply an impulse.

Following the inquiry, Colonel Winters ordered Wring to remain in his cabin, in

front of which he stationed a sentry. In vain both Brock and Pierce pleaded that he be spared the humiliation of a guard. The colonel was obdurate; he said that the cabin was a concession; his duty was to confine the suspected man in the ship's brig; he even hinted at putting him in irons.

The tragedy cast a pall over the passengers. Wring had been popular with every one, particularly the women. He was typically a man's man; and for that reason, he had caused no feelings of jealousy or pique by singling out for his attentions any particular member of the other sex.

Rushmore, on the contrary, was one of those men who are dependent on a woman's friendship. During the voyage he had spent most of his time chatting, or playing dominoes in the smoking-room, with Mrs. Little, a small, blonde, vivacious widow, who was returning home from a visit to her brother, Captain Carr, at Fort McKinley. Rumor had it that they were engaged, and she had not denied the rumor.

She learned of Rushmore's death at luncheon. She had been sitting in the dining-saloon, looking up expectantly and evidently ready with a moue of reproach, when Mrs. Winters, the colonel's stout, unimaginative wife, came in with a white face, and going directly to her told her without any prelude what had happened. Mrs. Little looked up at the speaker as if she could not at all comprehend what had been said.

"You don't mean—Captain Rushmore. It can't be——"

Then covering her face with her hands, she quietly slid down out of her chair to the floor.

Later in the afternoon, she left her cabin and went to the colonel's. I was standing on deck as she passed. Her face was haggard, and set in a hard mold from which I got an impression of vindictiveness.

I did not again see Brock until, as I was dressing for dinner, he entered. Knowing his friendship for Wring, I had wondered why, even though he believed him guilty, he had not sacrificed his conscience and reassured the younger when, during the inquiry, he had appealed to him. Now I asked him.

He dropped down on to my berth and, clasping his knee with his hands, looked up at me with his mild, seemingly guileless eyes:

"I thought you would understand that, Peel. It was because of the colonel. He

is an old man, governed entirely by his feelings. Before the inquiry he had made up his mind that Wring was guilty, and he feels very bitter toward him. Had I told Mort that I did not believe he killed Rushmore, it would have added fuel to the colonel's anger—he does me the honor to respect my opinion—and he would have been far severer than he was. I have little doubt that, had I done so, he would have put Wring in irons. It was hard, for the boy is innocent; but there was nothing to do but to keep silent."

"You don't think he killed Rushmore?" I asked, surprised and yet in some way reassured by Brock's positiveness.

"No more than you or I," returned the captain. "But let me tell you of a new piece of evidence. Mrs. Little this afternoon reported to the colonel that Wring possessed just such a knife as the assassin evidently used. She and Wring had been chatting of Moro weapons one afternoon, and he mentioned a curious knife, something between a bolo and a kris, which he had picked up in a pawn-shop at Jolo. She wished to see it; and he went below, took it from his trunk, brought it up and showed it to her. It had a queer, curving blade."

"And where is it now?"

"No one knows. Wring states that he carried the knife back to his cabin, and being in a hurry tossed it down somewhere and forgot about it. The ship has been searched; but if the knife is on board, it hasn't yet been found."

"And still you think him innocent?"

Brock stirred impatiently.

"Certain, I do," he said. "If I did not know that Morton Wring is incapable of such a crime, the mere perfection of the evidence would arouse my suspicion. Rushmore is killed with a curious knife in a manner which shows that the murderer was stirred by a savage hatred. Wring is known to have owned such a knife; he was seen coming from the direction of the cabin at a time when the deed might have been committed; he had received provocation which had left him when last seen in the grip of a deep, implacable rage. Nothing is missing, no link in the evidence; and because of that fact our reasoning is satisfied. Our minds reject other hypotheses. He could have done it; and, therefore, we immediately conclude that he did do it."

"But," I objected, "Rushmore was

killed. Some one must have done it. If not Wring, then who? There is not the slightest evidence implicating any one else."

Brock smiled.

"You are proving my point, Peel." Then rising, he added: "The evidence hasn't been searched for yet. Come on, let's go to dinner."

After hearing Mrs. Little's story, Colonel Winters had Wring transferred to the brig, a close, iron-barred cell in the forward part of the ship. No one was permitted to visit him without a written permit; and few sought such permission.

For the feeling toward Wring was slowly changing. In the first outburst of emotion, the sympathy of the ship had been largely for him. Rushmore's character was known, and the slur which he had cast upon Wring's wife fresh in mind.

But as the days passed the captain's bad points came to be lost sight of in the fact that he had been brutally killed while asleep. A man who could commit such a crime was deserving of no sympathy. Wring's guilt was taken as an accepted fact; the only question was his punishment. It was evident that when the *Grant* reached San Francisco, there would be few indeed among her passengers who would not wish to see a stern and speedy justice measured out to the lieutenant.

What Wring himself felt, I had no means of learning. The few times that I saw him, he was courteous, but reserved. He thanked me but did not take advantage of my offers to bring him food or books. The sentry before his door stated that the prisoner spent most of his time sitting on his cot with his arms folded, staring into infinity.

After that conversation in which he had maintained Wring's innocence, I could not draw Brock into a discussion of the case. If he was finding any evidence to support his theory, he did not speak of it; nor did he appear to be devoting special attention to its collection. He passed the time much as he had always done, reading in a corner of the smoking-room, playing chess with Major Pierce, or in the privacy of our cabin, working out a problem on a small pocket board.

Once or twice, on entering suddenly, I caught him sunk down in an absorbed reflection; but when I asked whether he had found a clue he only smiled without answer-

ing. Also I noticed that he was showing a sudden interest in my boy Juan.



THE night before we reached Honolulu, we were again in Pierce's cabin with our post-prandial cigars. For the first time since the day following the murder, Brock began to speak of it; at first generally, much in the manner in which he had discussed it with me. Then he went on to describe it in detail, painting a vivid picture of the way the deed had been committed, of the appearance of Rushmore's body, and of the knife. This he described with great minuteness, speculating on the fact that it had never been found. Presently he broke off and said to Pierce—

"I wonder if I might have a glass of ice-water?"

"Certainly," returned the major.

Mapa had again been in the room with us, and he had listened attentively to what Brock had said. Pierce sent him below for a pitcher.

On his return Mapa filled a glass and offered it to Brock, who took it as if to drink. Instead of doing so, however, he suddenly dashed it to the floor, and springing from his chair seized the boy by the shoulder.

"Tell me," he said in a rough, threatening voice, "what did you do with that knife after you had killed Captain Rushmore?"

Mapa writhed downward, trying to shake off Brock's grasp, while an expression of terror flashed into his eyes.

Pierce leaped excitedly to his feet.

"Look here, Brock, what do you mean—that boy——"

But the captain pushed him back with his disengaged hand, without turning from Mapa's face the intense look which he had fixed upon it.

"Come, you killed him. I have the proofs. Where is the knife?" he continued, shaking the boy furiously as he spoke.

"I, señor, I—what knife you talk about, señor?"

The words came out jerkily. Mapa was struggling to free himself, to avert his gaze from those blue eyes, which had suddenly lost their guilelessness and become cold, implacable and hard.

Brock's left hand shot forward and seized the boy by the chin, holding his look not only by his eyes but by the strength of his arm as well.

"Tell me, where is that knife?"

It may have been a sort of mesmerism, or it may have been the sheer force of Brock's spirit overmastering the weaker spirit of the boy whom he had thrown off his guard; but after a moment, during which their eyes held each other, Mapa's lips moved convulsively, and with a gasping intake of breath, he said in a somewhat high, breaking voice, "I let eet fall een the water, señor."

Brock released the boy, and Mapa straightened up.

"You killed him because he beat you, didn't you?"

Now that he had confessed the servant's manner changed. He seemed willing, even anxious to talk; and as his mind went back to Rushmore, his face took on an expression of mingled cunning and hatred:

"Sí, señor," he said. "I keel him. He keek me one day, and he say some time he keel me too eef I don't mind."

An hour later Mapa was in irons and Wring had taken his place among us. He held himself in check until Colonel Winters, after a speech in which he assured the lieutenant he had always been confident that his innocence would be vindicated, had departed; then covering his face with his hands he sat down and frankly sobbed his relief.

At last Pierce, who seemed overwhelmed with self-reproach, turned to Brock.

"How did you ever trace the crime to that boy?" he asked.

Brock leaned back and lighted a fresh cigar; his baby-blue eyes were bright, and on his boyish face a pardonable smile of satisfaction.

"I simply maintained an open mind," he said. "I knew that in spite of the evidence Morton Wring had not killed Rushmore; the crime was out of character; he simply could not have done it that way. But, then, who had? Obviously the murderer was on the ship."

"I got a passenger list and went through it, checking off each name as in my mind I eliminated its owner. One I set aside for more study, before I reached Mapa's. At his name I paused. He was at heart a savage, and the crime had been savage. That was a point of connection. Then I recalled that while we were talking in here that night, I had noticed him from time to time glancing at Rushmore. It had made little impression on me then; I attributed his attention to the fact that Rushmore was

conspicuous by his ugly temper; but as the scene came back to me, I seemed to have a sensation of both fear and repugnance in the boy's look. I realized that I might unconsciously be reading this feeling into it; as it turns out, I was not. You remember you gave Rushmore a powder to put him to sleep, emphasizing the fact that nothing could wake him that night. Mapa had overheard this; and he understands English sufficiently to have caught its meaning. Assuming then that the boy hated and wished to kill the captain, but was deterred from attempting it by his fear, this would be his opportunity.

"So far, then, I had found a person who could have murdered Rushmore as he was murdered. I did not assume that he had done so; I merely set myself the task of seeing whether I could find a motive for, and anything tangible connecting him with, the crime. I found the latter first; it was lying under the edge of the transom in Rushmore's cabin."

He took from his pocket and carefully unfolded a piece of paper on which was outlined in dull crimson something which resembled a roughly drawn U, widening from the bottom toward the top.

"What is this?" asked Pierce, after puzzling over the paper.

"That," went on Brock, "is an impression of a part of the opening between Mapa's great toe and the others. The great toe of these people spreads from its neighbors because they use it in climbing and have never confined their feet by shoes. Unfortunately the drop of blood on that paper was very small; and the impression is fragmentary. The balls of none of the toes are shown. In fact it would be of little use as evidence before the average jury."

"I had now in my own mind definitely connected him with the crime. The fact that he had used Wring's knife, I took to be chance. No doubt entering the cabin for some purpose previously, he had seen the weapon, and, being a Moro with an eye for knives, stolen it. He used it simply because he had it."

"Also, I may say here, I do not think he planned to lay the crime on Wring. The quarrel was pure coincidence—one of those coincidences which happen every day in our lives, and only when joined with other circumstances occasionally bring disastrous consequences."

"There remained then to discover the motive. This was more difficult. Perhaps the most dominant characteristic of the savage is cunning. I must obtain the evidence without awakening in Mapa the slightest suspicion that he was suspected.

"I learned the motive yesterday, in talking with Peel's boy, Juan, whom I had been cultivating. When the ship was in Nagasaki he and Mapa had gone ashore. Excited by their holiday and absorbed in what was going on about them, they did not give to their actions the attention which they should. In rounding a corner Mapa collided with a coolie drawing a rickshaw occupied by Captain Rushmore. The coolie stumbled and Rushmore was spilled. He was furious with Mapa and proceeded not only to maltreat but to threaten him. The boy has the Mohammedan's keen sense of personal dignity; he must have brooded over the insult, no doubt vowing to himself to avenge it.

"Then, of course, my case was complete;

but my evidence was so slight and intangible that without a confession there was little hope of convincing Colonel Winters that Mapa, not Wring, was the assassin. There seemed only one way by which a confession could be obtained; that was suddenly to take the boy off his guard, intimidate him and force it. I must say I had a good deal of doubt of that plan's working; but fortunately, as you saw, it did."

Brock ceased speaking, and, crossing to Wring, dropped his hand on the lieutenant's shoulder.

"So you see, Mort, I never doubted you; and in our hearts none of us ever did."

Wring looked up at him; but he could not put into words what he wanted to say.

It was Pierce who, after a moment's reflection, voiced I think, the feeling of us all, when he said—

"But suppose, Brock, you had not been aboard!"

For the Love of Annibel



by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "A Bull Movement in Yellow Horse," "All Wool," etc.



KNOWED it! I knowed it jist as well as though it had ben yelled from th' house-tops. Any time I hears uh noise like that I'm wise to th' fact that joy has departed from life.

I ain't one uh these fellers who see bad luck in black cats and prophesy bad weather from sun-dogs or th' shadow of th'

ground-hog, but, by cripes! any time I hears Magpie Simpkins massacrein' "Sweet Adeline" I'm plumb wise.

He stops jist outside th' cabin door and enlightens me that "yore th' flower-r-r-r-of my heart-t-t-t, sweet Ade-e-e-eline." Magpie shore has ambition but when he comes to ability he don' assay uh trace.

I gits my ol' .44 and sneaks to th' door.

"Pears to me that th' coyotes are gittin' thicker every day in Piperock," I orates aloud.

"Yore kind applause is appreciated, Mister Harper," sez he. "Nothin' tickles th' cockles of uh man's heart like hearty appreciation of his talents. I'm plumb grateful to yuh."

"Oh, hello, Magpie!" sez I, sorta surprised. "I reckon yuh done scared th' howler away."

Magpie bows. He rises to his six feet six, or thereabouts, and I'm surprised at his next move. He musses up his ha'r, spits on his hands and ambles up and down in front of th' cabin, draggin' first one foot and then th' other. He walks like uh man with th' rheumatics and all th' time he's sayin' somethin' like this:

"Curse yuh! Cur-r-rse yuh, Alexander Wiffletree, I'll have me revenge. It's th' papers or yore life!"

"I don't know Alex," sez I, "and I don't want to know any man with uh name like uh cross between uh de-ceased monarch and uh wagon decoration. Where does Alex tend bar, Magpie?"

"Avaunt!" roars Magpie, and glares at me like I had jist pushed him into uh cactus pile.

"Never saw th' place in my life," I states. "If you've jist come from there I'd shore admire to smell what he sold yuh."

Magpie stops millin' and puts on his hat. He grins at me and rolls uh smoke.

"What do yuh think of it, Ike?"

"I don't like it," I replies. "There's somethin' noble about drinkin' hooch which produces purple snakes and li'l green devils with red hats on but—Magpie, if I was you I'd shore let Alex's stuff plumb a-lone."

"Huh!" sez Magpie. "Ike, that's actin'."

"Unha," I agrees heartily. "She shore is. I've never seen anythin' act like that before. I've beheld uh half-breed Cree full uh lemon extract and turpentine, and I've seen uh half-witted Greaser lit up with tequila and sulphuric acid cocktails; but them sights were tame compared with what I've jist witnessed. I'm sorry, Magpie. Yore pore ol' stepfather would—"

"Ike Harper," sez he, "yo're locoed! I ain't had uh drink today. I was jist tryin' out my e-motions. I'm goin' to be uh actor."

"Actors don't have pardners, so that lets me out," sez I, sorta thankful like. I was

afraid he was goin' to rope me into one uh his schemes. "I'll hate to see yuh go, Magpie, but I feels shore you'll drop me uh line once in uh while. When do yuh reckon to leave?"

"I ain't goin' to leave."

"Oh, I see," sez I. "Yo're goin' to be uh actor but yo're still goin' to prospect or punch cows for uh livin'. Johnny Myers, of th' Five Dot outfit, was sayin' yesterday that all he could git nowadays was bad actors and mail-order punchers. Yuh might see him and——"

"Lissen!" sez he. "We're goin' to have uh show right here in Piperock."

I starts to orate that in my opinion nobody has uh show in Piperock, but Magpie is lookin' me in th' eye and I saws off on th' humor stuff. Magpie likes our fair city.

"It's this way, Ike," sez Magpie, makin' himself comfortable against uh lodgepole post. Magpie's shoulder-blades jist fits uh six-inch post and sorta lock around it. "There's uh lady jist comes to our town yesterday, th' name of which is Madame Della Selva, and she proclaims that she's goin' to produce uh reg'lar theater play called, 'For th' Love of Annibel.' She's goin' to rustle her outfit right here, and unless I'm uh heap mistaken I'm goin' to be th' foreman of that Annibel outfit. She calls it 'home talent,' Ike. She's aimin' to have it in th' old Mint dance hall. She reckons to build uh platform to play on, *sabe?* Tonight she's goin' to have us all come down there and talk it over. She's uh promisin' lookin' filly."

"Sounds like th' cover of uh cigar box," I replies. "Who is this Annibel person?"

"She's th' heeroine of th' show, Ike. Bein' familiar with this Annibel person, Miss Selva takes that part. Roll is what she calls it. You'll go with me tonight, Ike."

He didn't put no question mark after that last sentence and it makes me uh heap sore. But that's Magpie. He's always throwin' bricks in th' air and I'm th' li'l jasper what always gits it on th' head when she comes down.

I ain't no actor and I ain't got no ambition thataway. I know such things live and have their bein' 'cause I've seen 'em in honkatonks from Nome to th' Mexican border and across to Butte.

Once I saw uh show in Helena. It was, unless I'm uh heap mistaken, called "Love."

I stayed long enough to see three men get killed and then I went out to git uh drink and took my hat and overcoat along. I reads one time that plays have uh powerful influence on mankind. That one shore did with me. I've hardly spoken to uh female person since.

I re-fused Magpie jist like I always do. Ab-solutely refused to go down there with him. There was no reason why I should go. It didn't interest me none, so I said I wouldn't go.



WELL, when we got there, I reckon half th' population was there. Old Tellurium Woods was occupyin' one of th' front chairs and beside him was old Judge Steele. In my opinion them two ought to be killed while they're happy.

Th' old judge was wearin' his long-tailed coat and Tellurium was clean shaved from his upper lip to th' back of his collar. Th' point of interest seemed to be uh fe-male over in th' corner. She was bein' close herded by Ricky Henderson, Slim Hawkins and Art Miller.

"That's Della Selva," states Magpie. "Come over and I'll give yuh a knockdown to her, Ike."

We starts over that way but th' fe-male beats us to it. She pushes Slim to one side and lopes right up to me. She's what you'd call uh light sorrel and frisky fer her age. She shows uh right good gold prospect when she grins, and she hooks right on to my coat.

"I've never met you, have I?" she asks.

I don't have time to answer before Magpie butts in.

"Miss Selva," sez he, "this person is Ike. He's all right at heart but he looks mean. His other name is Harper."

I sees about twenty-five dollars' worth uh gold when she smiles this time, and she makes uh noise like uh moose bird when it discovers uh nice fat grub.

"Mister Harper, I'm de-lighted!" sez she. "I know jist th' part I wants yuh to take. You see I've got to——"

"Miss," sez I, "I ain't no actress a-tall. I jist comes to this meetin' to keep cases on Magpie Simpkins." I taps my head and winks at her. "Oh no," sez I, "he ain't dangerous. I stopped him before he eats all th' loco weed. All he ate was th' roots."

"Well!" sez she, jist like that. "Well!"

She looks at Cobalt Williams and Slim

and they're swallerin' hard and havin' trouble with their collars. Magpie puts his hand on my shoulder sorta easy like and I'm, well, sorta sorry I spoke.

Jist then in comes Buck Masterson and Miss Dougherty, th' new schoolma'am, and Buck is leanin' on her arm like uh cripple. Buck wouldn't be uh bad-lookin' feller if it wasn't fer his face. Fer two years he's been keepin' steady company with Miss Harris, the postmistress, and now here he's bustin' his cinch tryin' to locate some school property.

I hates uh two-faced man, and as soon as I had uh chance I got Buck over in th' corner and tells him so. It makes him sore and he orates that he ain't no such thing, and if he was he'd loan me one of them so I could appear in select company. Miss Harris was there, too, but she don't act like she cared much.

After uh lot uh general wau-wau Miss Selva gits up on th' fiddler's platform and looks us over.

"Friends," sez she, "we may as well proceed to business. I've decided to give Mister Masterson th' part of Annibel's father. Mister Woods will do nicely as Mose Johnson, th' colored retainer of th' family. Miss Harris will——"

"Desist!" sez Tellurium, standin' up. "Do I decipher yore oration to th' extent that I'm to be uh nigger?"

"Yes, you'll be th' old colored man who saves——"

"Desist twice!" snorts Tellurium. "I draws th' color line. I'll be anything else in th' outfit, but I'll be——"

Cobalt Williams and Slim Hawkins had done got up and walked around in front of Tellurium when he opines.

"You'll be th' ol' colored man, Tellurium," sez Cobalt.

Tellurium looks at Cobalt and then at Slim, and switches his chew to th' other side of his fat face.

"Yes," sez he, "if yuh puts it thataway, Cobalt."

"Now," continues th' fe-male with th' Havana-filler name, "I'll give Miss Harris th' part of th' adventures."

Miss Harris is about five feet four inches high, forty-four years old and has uh rosy li'l nose. Her hair ain't none too luxuriant, and she favors one front foot uh heap. Jist bein' alive is enough adventure fer uh fe-male like her.

Miss Selva goes right on without no comments:

"I'll cast Mister Williams as Jake Fillmore, th' village cut-up. This is uh rural drama, sprinkled with real comedy."

When anybody sez "comedy" to me I be-gins to git organized. I knowed two fellers oncet who helped lynch uh hoss thief, and one uh them said it was comical to see that feller swing around on that rope and kick. They both snickered out loud while they was a-tellin' about it.

"Now," sez this fe-male person, "I'll cast Mrs. Smith as Sary Suzenhammer, th' village gossip."

By cripes! She shore hit th' bull's-eye that crack! Mrs. Smith beats any daily paper on earth fer local news. Somebody snorts out loud and Mrs. Smith ruffles up like an ol' hen. Wick Smith gits red behind his ears and loosens his gun. Miss Selva sees that she's made uh noise in church, so she gits busy talkin' again.

"I'll se-lect th' rest of th' cast later. With one or two exceptions them are th' main rolls, and one uh them exceptions I'm goin' to speak about right now. I need uh leadin' man. He must be good lookin' and able to make love."

Magpie shifts in his chair, twists his mustache and glares at Slim Hawkins, who is doin' th' same, only Slim ain't got no mustache. He don't realize he had it cut off th' day before.

"I'd like to suggest," remarks Slim, "that I've——"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Magpie in uh high key. "Slim is jist about to——"

Slim jumps to his feet and appears to be listenin' for uh moment and then he turns to Cobalt.

"Cobalt," sez he, "did yuh hear that? By golly! That ol' crippled jackass yuh sold Sourdough Watson, down to Mica, has shore come back home! I'd know his voice among uh thousand."

"As I was goin' to say," continues Slim, "I feels that in that kind of uh part I'd be there four ways from th' jack. I've done read love stories by Bertha M. Clay and I'm jist finishin' uh book called 'Love Letters to Lonesome Men.' I feels that I can put th' proper quavers on my voice; and I don't look so awful."

Slim looks right at 'Magpie when he makes that last statement and then sits down.

Magpie ain't no Venus when it comes to shape. He looks like th' architect who planned him had started out to make uh memorial to uh lodge-pole, lost th' plans and let some drunken workmen finish th' job. Yuh simply got to look up to men like Magpie.

"All I've got to say," states Magpie, standin' up and pickin' splinters out of th' ceilin', "is this: Miss Selva comes clear out here to put on this show and I'd shore hate to see it ruined. Now, I'm fitted to that leadin' part like machine-oil on uh six-gun, and I shore won't re-liquish my chances without uh murmur."

Miss Selva clears her beautiful throat and smiles at all of us.

"I was just thinkin' that perhaps Mister Harper would care for the part," she states, soft like.

"Beggin' yore pardon, lady," sez Magpie, "I reckon I misunderstood yuh. I thought yuh said 'uh good-lookin' man and one who could make love.'"

"Haw! Haw!" squeaks Slim. "Tke Harper, leadin' lover!"

That made me sore. Bein' of uh retirin' disposition don't argue that uh man ain't got no ability. I gits up on my hind legs and slides my ol' .44 around to th' front.

"Ma'am," sez I, "I shore appreciates th' honor but I'm uh li'l out uh practise. Punchin' cows and shovelin' gravel into uh sluice sorta rusts uh feller fer lovin'. I honors myself by acceptin' th' job and then relieves th' feelin's uh some wise jaspers by resignin' immediate and sudden. I thanks yuh again."

"Wise words, Ike," sez Magpie, as I sets down.

"Unha," sez I, "I supposed you and Slim both had me covered from behind."

"Well," sez Miss Selva, thoughtful like, "perhaps Mister Henderson will accept th' roll."

Ricky started to git up but he happened to look at Magpie and Slim and he sets down some sudden. Ricky don't even de-cline. He wets his lips and starts to roll uh smoke. He gits it made, throws it on th' floor and then puts th' sack of tobacco in his mouth. He ain't in no shape to take th' part a-tall. Jist about this time Pete Gonyer sa'nters in and sets down alongside of his wife. Th' minute Miss Selva sees him she grins.

"Mister Gonyer might take th' part," she opines.

Pete looks at her and then at his wife, and swallows his chew.

"Aw!" sez he, jist like that. "Aw!" And he slides down in his seat so only his nose shows.

"Well," sez Miss Selva, "I'll give both Mister Simpkins and Mister Hawkins uh chance. I will start rehearsal tomorrow afternoon and I want everybody present. Tomorrow I will pass out th' parts."

Bein' uh home-lovin' sort of uh feller and not carin' fer too much excitement, I takes th' stage out of Piperock th' next mornin'.

I got uh li'l minin' deal to talk over with some fellers over in Helena and I'm also goin' to take uh trip down to Warm Springs to see uh friend uh mine. That's where th' asylum is located. This friend uh mine took uh job herdin' sheep oncet. I try to see him once uh year. He thinks he's uh taranteler.

It's two weeks before I returns to Piperock. I don't ask Art Miller, th' stage driver, no questions but I see that he's plumb thoughtful over somethin'.



WHEN I goes up to our cabin I finds Magpie with th' parts of his six-gun scattered over th' bunk promiscuous like and he's polishin' and oilin' some particular.

"What's th' idea?" I asks, pointin' at th' gun.

"Dress rehearsal tonight," sez he, short like.

"Are you takin' th' part of an outlaw?" I asks.

"No," sez he, "but I may take th' scalp uh one."

"How's th' show comin' on?" I asks.

Magpie slips that ol' gun together and snaps it at uh knothole in th' floor.

"To th' bitter end!" he snorts.

"Well," sez I, "it lasted longer than I figured. Jist about what's th' trouble, Magpie?"

Magpie lays th' gun down and rolls uh smoke.

"Ike," sez he, "remember th' time th' Injuns had me and you corraled in that blind cañon down in Arizona? Remember how we felt when that Apache war-whoop got up in th' rocks above us and cut my suspenders th' first shot? Well, that was an old ladies' afternoon tea-party beside this Annibel thing.

"In th' first place she takes Buck Master-son's part away from him and makes Judge

Steele th' father of Annibel. Mrs. Smith re-fused to be th' village gossip so they switches her and Miss Harris. Ike, jist consider an adventuress weighin' two-seventy in her socks and squeaky with th' asmy. Cobalt takes his part so danged serious like that he ain't been sober fer uh week. Somebody told him he was funny when he was drunk and he's aimin' to git all th' comedy out of his part.

"Miss Dougherty is what Miss Selva calls th' on-gen-yew. She is supposed to make love to Ricky Henderson and it makes Buck Masterson so danged sore that he fired Ricky and hired another bartender.

"Ricky helped Tellurium to make up as uh coon last week. They never thought of burnt cork so they used ink. Ricky painted Tellurium's bald head too and that stuff won't even wear off. It's waterproof, Ike, and Tellurium has issued his ultimatum to th' effect that as soon as th' show is over he is goin' to kill Ricky by slow torture."

"How's yore part?" I asks.

Magpie picks up th' gun and slips th' cylinder full uh stub-nosed forty-fives before he answers.

"That's settled. I jist can't seem to understand that Miss Selva. I plumb wore out my Sunday pants makin' love to her on my knees. I've orated every line of that part, Ike, and I've shore orated it right too, but she ain't satisfied. Anyway she's elected Slim to that job and handed me th' part of Kirk Devill, th' villian, which Art Miller was due to play. Say, Ike, yuh ought to see that Slim Hawkins act. He's plumb bow-legged and every time he gits down on his knees to orate love to her he has to cross his feet. She calls my part th' 'heavy'. It's shore goin' to be uh load fer somebody, Ike, and it ain't goin' to be me."

"Ike, there's uh race-hoss in this play—reg'lar hoss on th' stage. Miss Selva picked it out of Art Miller's herd without no advice from anybody. She opines that she knows hosses and Art Miller, after havin' his part taken away from him and bein' sorta thrown into th' discard, don't have th' heart to argue with her. She picks old Squaw!"

"Well," sez I, "mebbly she ain't got no actors with reputations but she shore has uh hoss which has."

Old Squaw can kick th' soda out of uh biscuit and never bust th' crust, and I've see her buck an aparejo loaded with drill steel plumb off and never loosen th' cinch.

As uh cultus actor she couldn't have picked uh better one.

"Bein' as half uh Piperock is in th' play and th' other half is sore about it, what yuh goin' to do fer a audience?" I asks.

"We'll have th' crowd, Ike. We've done advertised that there'll be uh dance after th' show, and I'll bet everybody in Mica and Curlew will be there."

"Well," sez I, "I hope there won't be no casualties."

"You and me both," agrees Magpie, standin' up and practisin' throwin' his six-gun. "Yuh never can sometimes always tell Annibel strikes me as bein' uh trouble-breder. Ike, I wish yuh had uh stop-watch so yuh could time me. I'm gittin' faster every day."

I didn't go over to th' hall that night. I happened to git into uh poker game at Buck's place and forgot th' rehearsal until along about eleven-thirty Ricky Henderson sticks his head into th' saloon and asks Buck to sell him uh pint of alcohol. He wants it to take th' soreness out of uh black eye. He's shore got uh beauty.

When I gits home Magpie's snorin' his head off and oratin' in his sleep about "gittin' th' papers and turnin' th' old folks out in th' cold."

In th' mornin' he don't have nothin' to say. I puts in th' day safely and organizes myself fer th' evenin' festivities.



ALONG about four o'clock th' people start comin' in. You know how they come—anything from uh four-hoss load to uh lone prospector with his burro. By eight th' Mint Hall is plumb full.

Ol' man Thatcher and his two boys sit down in front to dispense th' music—two fiddles and uh banjo. Sourdough Watson and Half-Mile Smith, from Mica, sits one on each side uh me and jist in front is Dirty Shirt Jones, from Curlew.

Sourdough is wearin' uh heavy frown and I asks him why for?

"Boots!" sez he. "Danged things too small. Gits 'em a purpose fer this dance. I wears twelves and these are elevens and a half. Reckon I'll take 'em off."

"Th' same of which don't appeal to me a-tall," states Dirty Shirt, turnin' around and lookin' at Sourdough. "I done paid two dollars fer this seat and I argues fer my rights."

"Bein' from Curlew," states Sourdough, "yore olifactory nerves ain't in no state to de-tect odors. Yo're used to real smells."

I reckon there would have been uh chore fer Th' Hague right then, but jist then th' curtain went up and Sourdough slips off his boots.

There is one side of uh house on the stage and uh li'l fence and on this fence is uh li'l yaller-haired gal. By golly, it's Miss Selva, but she don't look more than fifteen. She talks to herself fer uh while but there is so much noise I don't *sabe* what she says.

Then out comes Judge Steele, wearin' uh black suit and false whiskers and leanin' on uh cane.

"Dawlin'," sez he, "yore pappy is gittin' ol' and feeble."

"Haw! Haw!" roars somebody. "Dawlin, yore pappy's whiskers are slipping already. Better give 'em uh half-hitch before he loses 'em."

Th' judge sits down and plasters them whiskers back into place. Miss Selva looks th' crowd over with uh mean look and then squats down in front of th' judge.

"Daddy," sez she, "ain't there nothin' I can do?"

"Gol ram th—— Keep off my bunion!" yelps th' judge, and grabs his whiskers jist in time.

Jist then Tellurium comes on. He's th' shiniest nigger I ever seen. He's got uh pair uh calico pants on and they're jist about to bust in spots.

"Vell, Miss Annibel," sez he, "see vat I prings yuh. De first magnolia plossom of de season."

Dirty Shirt turns around and remarks:

"I've knowed some niggers in my life but that's th' first one I ever saw with uh German accent. It don't stand to— Say, Sourdough, you got yore boots off?"

Sourdough is too busy watchin' th' play to answer. Another person has showed up. It's Cobalt Williams and he's drunker than seven hundred dollars. He shore re-ssembles uh hayseed in looks. He leans against th' fence and said fence resents such familiarity by fallin' down. Cobalt gits up and leans against th' house and Tellurium removes him jist in time to save th' whole structure.

Things seem to be uh li'l mixed, cause jist at this time in comes Ricky Henderson. He's sa'nterin' along whistlin' and stumbles over Tellurium's foot.

"Tellu—Mose Johnson, yuh black——!" snaps Ricky.

"Look where yo're goin', yuh stub-nosed maverick!" snorts Tellurium, as he lifts th' porch around so she fits th' house again.

Cobalt sits down on th' porch and fumbles fer th' makin's.

"Chawlie," gurgles Miss Selva, lookin' at Ricky, "when did you come? I've been lookin' fer you for so long."

"Look'n fer him," laughs Cobalt. "By g-gosh, Ricky, I can shee two of yuh. One of yuh co-come over an' si' down on schtaps."

Judge Steele gits nervous and wipes his face with a big red-and-blue handkerchief. Naturally he loosens his whiskers, which he puts in his pocket and then tries to make the handkerchief stick to his face. Talk about buck fever!

Jist then Mrs. Smith and Magpie shows up. By cripes! I shore had to snort out loud. Mrs. Smith has got on Bill Holt's hard hat and uh long black dress and is carryin' uh cane. Magpie has got on Judge Steele's swaller-tailed coat, green pants and uh pair uh shiny boots that Buck Masterson won from Kid Hanley seven years ago. Magpie's got his mustache and eyebrows blacked and on top of his head he's sportin' uh shiny plug hat, which makes him about seven and uh half feet tall. Mrs. Smith is jist about that in circumference.

Nobody on th' stage has seen them yet although they makes uh heap uh noise and stands in plain sight.

"Sh-h-h-h!" sez Magpie. "Play th' game, my dear, and Sunnybrook farm is ours. All we need is th' papers."

"Trust me, Mag—Dirk," sez she in that asmy voice, "I know—uh—my b-business."

"Sunnybrook?" snorts Dirty Shirt. "That name makes me dry as— Sourdough, you got them boots off?"

Jist then Slim Hawkins comes on. He ain't got no hat on, his sleeves are rolled up and his collar is unbuttoned. He's packin' uh hoss-shoe and uh hammer.

"Colonel," sez he to Judge Steele, "I've been—say, where in —— are yore whiskers?"

The judge removes th' handkerchief and looks it over.

"Go on, Slim," sez he. "You play yore part and I'll play mine. Th' danged mucilage was weak, I reckon."

"I was jist goin' to say that I've done

shoed Black Bess," said Slim, "and I'm believin' she'll win th' Cotton handicap."

"My boy!" yells th' judge, grabbin' fer Slim's hand and gittin' th' hammer instead. "I'd die happy if such things could be. It would pay off th' mortgage on Sunnybrook and make things easy fer my li'l gal, Annibel."

"Hist!" sez Magpie to Mrs. Smith. "I have it now! I'll fix that hoss so she can't win that race. All you got to do is to win th' sympathy of th' ol' man and th' gal. Go to it!"

There's an old pump in th' yard and Mrs. Smith waddles over towards it sorta tired like. She grunts as she leans against it and tries to pump a drink. She's so weak she sits down.

"Daddy, who is that?" asks Miss Selva, when she sees Mrs. Smith. "Why, daddy, she's faintin'!"

Tellurium trots over and grabs her around th' waist and tries to hold her up. By cripes! He shore needed uh derrick, 'cause they both goes to th' mat and *smash!* There ain't no more pump.

"You pore woman," sez th' judge, wettin' his whiskers and wipin' her face with them. "Some pore wanderin' woman without uh friend. Pore li'l thing! Almost starved to death. Mose, go in and fix th' guestroom fer our visitor."

Jist then in comes Miss Harris. She takes one look at Mrs. Smith and then squeaks out loud:

"I wouldn't take her in, colonel. She can't be uh good woman and dress like that. Mebby she's plannin' to steal th' family plate. She's too purty to trust."

"Haw! Haw!" yells somebody down in front. "If that's th' case we'd better look out fer them Digger Injun squaws down to Cinnamon Creek."

Wick Smith got up and walked aroun' in front of th' audience.

"Who made them re-marks?" he asks.

"That ask goes double!" states Mrs. Smith, who has recovered from her faint spell and is now standin' on th' edge of th' stage. "Some uh you wise galoots from——"

Mrs. Smith's oration is postponed. There comes uh rip and uh smash and uh section of two-by-four comes sailin' across th' stage and hits Mrs. Smith in th' widest part. She squawks loud and settles down gracefully on ol' man Thatcher's head and plumb ruins

his fiddle. Uh piece uh that same scantlin' swipes Judge Steele across th' shins and th' judge pinwheels outa sight, cussin' like uh mule skinner. Miss Selva lets uh man-sized whoop escape from her system and emigrates.

"Whoopee!" yells Sourdough, who is nervous and excitable. "Yohe-e-e! Whoop!"

He picks up one of his boots and starts to throw it at th' stage. Jist at that time Dirty Shirt starts to stand up and get uh better view of th' stage and that boot heel swats him just behind th' off ear.

"Ump!" sez Dirty Shirt satisfied like, and slumps down into his chair and slides from there to th' floor.

"Nice work, Sourdough," applauds Half Mile. "Nothin' gaudy nor messy. Jist clean and comfortable. Git it patented."

My attention is drawn back to th' stage. That pretty li'l house is rapidly comin' to th' front and there's uh heap uh noise behind it. Then I hears Magpie's voice yellin'—

"Kick, yuh son-of-a-gun, kick!"

And then out on th' stage comes old Squaw, with Cobalt on her back and she's kickin' delirious delight out of everything in sight.

"Yowhee!" yells Cobalt. "Buck, you sorrel, buzzard-headed, sun-fishin', chunk uh coyote bait! Yeow-w-w-h!"

Did she buck? Say, that hoss has th' rep of bein' th' prize buck of Montana, but I reckon that she pulls enough right there in th' middle of that li'l stage to stretch that rep to cover everything west of Chicago.

I counts th' jumps that Cobalt stayed and it was jist two. After which he stands on his head in th' first row of seats fer uh moment and then shoves his boots into Bill Thatcher's face and goes to sleep.

Old Squaw starts to jump right off the stage into th' audience and all th' male members begins to throw their hats at her to make her go back. Jist about this time Dirty Shirt comes back to life and gits th' foolish idea that them hats are to be shot at.

Th' first I knowed about it was when his big gun exploded almost under my nose, and th' lights went out. Th' stage light has been busted fer some time and Dirty Shirt's bullet plumb ruins th' big kerosene lamp in th' ceilin'. I reckon that tap on th' head sorta queered his aim and he shoots high.

Say, that shore was some convention! I

could hear everybody yellin' and pushin' and tryin' to find th' door and git away from that crazy cayuse in th' dark. Jist about that time Dirty Shirt yells in my ear:

"I told yuh not to take them boots off!"

And then *Bam!* Somethin' hits me on th' head and I saw th' fall of Rome.



WHEN I gits things straightened out again there ain't no noise goin' on a-tall. It shore is dark and silent. As I starts to set up I hears some one cuss fluently and then uh match is lit.

"I jist come back," sez uh voice, and I recognizes Dirty Shirt, "to find out who I hit with that boot. I thought it was Sourdough, but I finds that he goes out ahead of me."

"I'm goin' to quit wearin' uh gun," sez I, "and wear a boot. They has th' same effect without th' noise and smoke."

"Then you ain't sore at me, Ike?" he asks.

"Not any, Dirty," sez I. "I thanks yuh fer showin' me th' efficiency of modern weapons."

"Well," sez he, rubbin' th' place behind his off ear, "I've been showed, too, so we're both eddicated, Ike. Let's go over and git uh drink. Bein' as that bronk done busted up our orchestra there ain't goin' to be no dance."

"Did anybody git killed?" I asked.

"Not yet. Miss Harris and Miss Selva are over at Holt's house takin' turns at havin' his hsteeriks or somethin' like that. Mrs. Smith won't ride hossback fer uh spell, and old man Thatcher suffered uh broken rib and uh fracture of th' fiddle. Old Squaw kicked all of Ricky Henderson's front teeth out and ever cut his lips, after which she essays to dive out of one uh th' rear windows. She did it too, Ike."

We starts across th' street towards Masterson's saloon and meets Magpie.

"Where's everybody?" I yells.

"Shut up!" snaps Magpie. "Don't make so danged much noise, Ike. Judgin' from some of th' opinions I've heard expressed, our one-act thriller wasn't appreciated, and most of th' crowd are on uh still hunt fer me and Cobalt. Uh course they blames us. Have you got uh gun with yuh, Ike?"

"Shore have. Where's yours?"

"I had it in my hip pocket when the cyclone hit and I accidently gits in range of old Squaw. She jist naturally kicks me uh

glancin' blow which hooks under that six-gun and I reckon it follwered uh quarter section of my pants plumb out of th' county. I seen Cobalt foolin' with th' mare and I goes over to see what he's doin'. Jist then it started. It shore spoiled one good show, Dirty Shirt."

"That last re-mark shore prejudices me agin you, Magpie. That were th' worst show—barrin' none—that I ever seen."

"Ike," sez Magpie, "give me yore gun!"

I did jist that, and he turns to Dirty Shirt.

"Mister Jones, do you appreciate art as it is expressed in our efforts this evenin'?" sez he, fondlin' that ol' gun.

"I done lost my gun in th' ruckus," complains Dirty Shirt, "and I done left that boot up-stairs. Bein' in said position I don't hesitate to state that I shore does appreciate it to th' depth of my artistic soul, Mister Simpkins."

"Hoo, hoo!" sez uh li'l voice behin' us, and we all turns and strains our eyes in th' dark.

"Hoo, hoo, yourself," returns Magpie.

"Co-come over here and lift this—danged sidewalk off," pleads a voice, which we recognize as belongin' to Cobalt.

We goes over to th' entrance of th' hall and lights some matches. We sees two hands protrudin' from under th' walk, which was smashed flat in th' hurried exit. We lifts it up and hauls out th' re-mains of Cobalt Williams.

"I give thee much thanks fer succor," wheezes Cobalt.

"If I hadn't left that boot behind!" mourns Dirty Shirt. "Save uh man's life and then have him call yuh uh sucker!"

"This is uh different kind of uh fish," states Magpie.

"They're all alike except oysters," opines

Dirty Shirt. "I'm goin' over and git some hooch. My nerves shore need bracin'."

Dirty Shirt goes weavin' off across th' street and then I turns to Magpie.

"Let's all go up to our cabin. No use stayin' here on th' street and invitin' disaster."

When we gits up there Cobalt wants to know what I means by speakin' of disaster. He sez he remembers fallin' down-stairs and rollin' under th' walk, and that th' walk done laid down on him.

"What did yuh do to that hoss?" asks Magpie. "Didn't I see yuh rubbin' her hip?"

"Yes," sez Cobalt, "I was doctorin' her. You see she's got uh cut on her hip and Masterson tells Art Miller what to git to put on it. Art gits th' dope on his last trip and, bein' sorta peeved at th' show bunch, he asks me to rub some of it into th' cut in th' evenin'. He didn't want it to git any worse."

"Cobalt," asks Magpie, "do yuh know jist what medicine that was?"

"Shore. I heard Masterson tell Art to git some carbonate bi-sulfid. He said that with uh li'l external massage it would bring uh dead hoss to life."

"You—" began Magpie, but Cobalt wails:

"Aw, don't git sore, Magpie. I only follered directions."

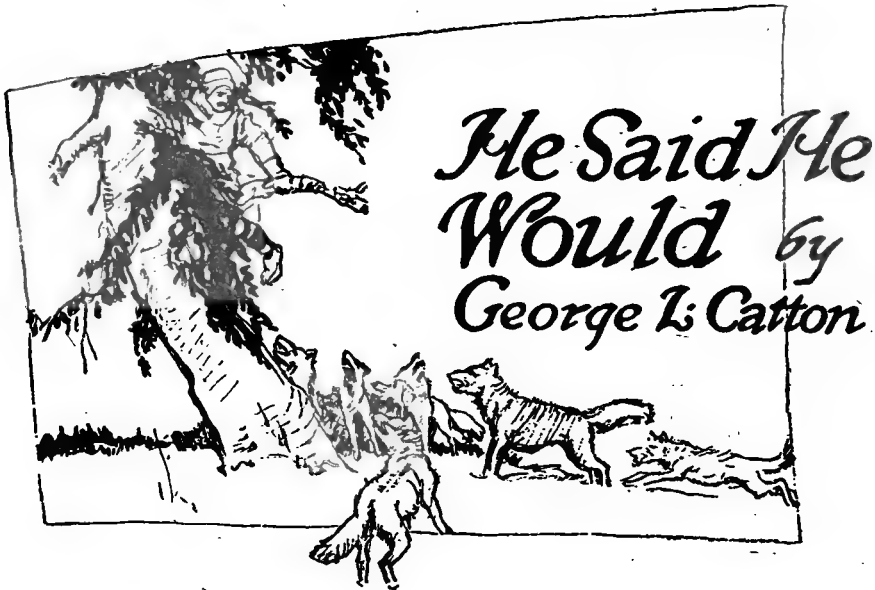
"*Errare est humanum*," quotes Magpie seriously.

"Th' same in United States means what, Magpie?" asks Cobalt.

"That," sez Magpie, "in th' Cree language means 'To forgive is divine.' I forgives yuh, Cobalt, fer beatin' me to it. I had uh stick ready to put under that bronk's tail."

"For th' love of —" sez I.

"Make it Annibel," sez Magpie.



He Said He Would by George L. Catton

BOB MACLEOD climbed a tree, but Bob was a big man and started late, so the leading wolf got a mouthful of moccasin before he could swing his feet clear; but that was all they got.

Then because the brutes stuck, Bob had to choose between two ways of dying: blue with the frost, or red among the wolves. He decided on blue as the least painful; then, too, there was a chance of the brutes getting tired of waiting and moving on before the frost got him.

Bob could see the roof of his shack at the bottom of the hill and the curl of his chimney smoke against the blackness of the solid river beyond, but he had just two legs, and tardy ones at that, and there were twenty sets of four streaks of lightning dancing in the snow between.

He buckled the slack of his heavy belt around a limb, to keep himself from falling when the frost drove him to sleep, and proceeded leisurely to thin out the snarling pack beneath. He got five before the gun hammer clucked on a dead cartridge.

Then in the dreamy drowsiness preceding the white death of forty below, that the best of wool without strenuous action is useless against, he looked back with a smile—to Jean.

Two hundred miles down the river as water runs to Kelly's Landing, Kentucky

Jean—Jean MacLeod—Bob's Jean—divided her attention between the keys of Kelly's bullet-holed piano, and Bob—her Bob. Bob had been gone nearly a year and as yet she had received no word of him.

Every night when she sat down to play the accompaniment to the rattle of the dice, the jingling clink of heavy glass and the sibilant curses of the card players, she would look for new faces among that cosmopolitan swarm of rough-necks, hoping that some one of them coming down had brought word from Bob. But the brief Summer had frozen into Winter, Christmas and New Years had gone, men had long since quit going out, and the out ones didn't come in now to shake their heads and leer at her when she asked that question.

If Bob had been coming in at all that year he'd have arrived before the river quit running. Maybe he—Jean caught her breath, missing two notes of her ancient waltz, and sneered when Carl Mack, noticing the unusual break in her music, looked up from his game to leer at her.

Ever since Bob went away Carl Mack had been leering at her. Some day when they were out of that land of necessity, away from Carl Mack's too anxious gun, she'd tell Bob about that leer, but now—she swung her revolver around to lie in her lap and smiled to herself.

There was none of the yellow clay in Jean.

Scarcely five feet three inches in height, there was one hundred and thirty live pounds of Kentucky mountain, optimistic, take-care-of-myself practical sand casting Jean's shadow.

Jean's faith in the rougher sex in general had been tormented out of her after her father died, and before Bob MacLeod hit the Landing, but after that her faith in Bob had never slipped but once, and that once had taken him away from her for a longer time this time than ever before. Still Jean smiled and pounded out the music. Bob was a dreamer, strong willed and limned, and she knew that that combination was always a winner. Then, too, she knew that Bob felt that there was but one Jean—herself.

Five years back when Bob came up the river and stood watching her play that piano, she had looked up into his face with the old sneer and started to swing her revolver up into her lap. Instead, she smiled and complied with his request to meet him the next afternoon. There was something in Bob's heavy voice, little brown eyes and pugnacious jaw that didn't usually accompany those coarse casts of features.

And a month later when they stood down below the alders on the river bank, she had looked into his eyes, felt the mighty muscles of his arm around her shoulders, and listening to his many great promises knew he meant them. And even after a year after the legal knot had been tied in Dawson, and he had been "up the river" twice and come back empty handed, her new found faith in him was as solid as ever. Nor did the next year, or the next, make the slightest difference.

"Some day," she told herself, counting his many trips out on her two hands, "he'll come back down the river with a grinning face as wide as the old piano, and that little bag I made him holding down the other end of his canoe. Then we'll go back to Kentucky, back to the land of the living. Some day."

But when the fourth year came with its tenth luckless trip "up the river" and brought her a memory-breeding letter from the log cabin in the Kentucky mountains she had wakened Bob that night with her sobbing, though she had tried not to with a pillow.

She had heard his teeth click together when he rolled over. He had taken her in

his arms with a bear hug that reminded her again of his great strength, and in that deep, rumbling voice that held something more emphatic than mere conviction had brought back her faith in him. And all through the small hours to daylight she knew he lay awake; she could hear him grinding his teeth. The next morning he had dumped his packs into his canoe and grabbing her by the two shoulders looked her straight in the eyes.

"I'll bring back—" he had started to say and stopped then to grope for something definite. His face grew very grave.

"I'll bring back ten thousand dollars," he gritted, his jaws clamped shut, "or I won't come back!"

And when a man makes up his mind that way; when a man clamps his teeth down till the muscles of his jaws stand out in rigid knots and says, "I will!" what is—who is—how are you going to stop him?

It can't be done.

When he says "I will!" just like that, he'll do it. And she knew he'd do it.



BOB said he'd bring back ten thousand dollars, but ten months later he had only the half of it dug out of the hole in the hill behind his shack; had just five thousand dollars in raw money in that little canvas bag that Jean had made and penned his name upon. He had kept just one-half of the optimistic half of his promise when he climbed the tree, and with fifteen merciless full-sized hell-hounds between him and shelter—between life and death—the alternative half of his promise: "Or I won't come back!" looked almost certain to be kept; but Bob had always faced adversity.

Hour after hour he vainly fought off the unconquerable unconsciousness that the frost drives in with but one thought in his drowsy mind—he'd keep his last promise to Jean.

"I will! I will! I will!" that thought beat through his mind. "I will! I will! I will!"

In the snow at the foot of the tree the wolves snarled at each other and made vicious snapping leaps for his hanging feet, but always they fell short.

"I will! I will! I will!" his fading thoughts stuck at it. "I will! I will! I will! I will!"

Daylight came and the wolves got tired

of waiting, but—down the hill in the shack the carefully banked fire settled lower on the stones in the fireplace, and the gray ashes whirled in the eddying draft. A mouse found a coat on the floor and made a warm nest in one of the pockets. Outside, a trackless blanket of snow laid itself down on the side of the hill and that solidly frozen thing in the tree sagged in the belt and swung with the wind.

Then the last of a vicious Winter retreated when the sun started back and frozen things disintegrated. There were five little mice in the pocket of the coat on the floor of the shack.

Men began to get restless when the bare earth steamed in the sun, and down the swollen river came Jim King. Jim was hiking for the outside before his mind changed of its own accord; if there was anything in the grub line in that deserted shack at the bottom of the hill, he needed it. He pulled his canoe up on to the bank and kicked in the door.

He found Bob's socks hung over the fire—a fire that had starved to death—and Bob's tobacco pouch lay open on the bunk. A mouse and five little ones scampered across the floor when he lifted an old coat. Jim didn't know Bob, but he knew men and the country and their ways, and evidence when he saw it. He went outside to investigate.

Up the hill under a tree Jim found a rusty revolver with five empty chambers and a round skull that he knew did not belong naturally among all those short ribs and long-toothed lower jaws. He scratched his head and glanced up into the tree. Bob's heavy belt yet encircled a little more than just the limb. Then Jim found the hole in the hill.

Jim was strong on logic, two and two always made four with him. He sat down on the dump outside the hole and did some figuring.

He could almost see Bob going out of the shack at night to set a trap, maybe; could see him start back when he heard the wolves, and climb the tree when he saw he couldn't make the shack. He imagined he could see the brutes dancing around the foot of the tree long after Bob had gone to sleep.

He shrugged his shoulders. He himself had faced worse death than freezing in the last few months. And for what? He felt of his belt, of the hard little lump that would

barely pay his way out, and smiled sarcastically. And this man in the tree had lost his life—for what?

Jim got up and went into the shack. An hour later he pushed his canoe off the sand and started for Kelly's again. And lying in front of him under a thwart was the little canvas bag that Kentucky Jean had made for Bob, containing the five thousand dollars that was half of Bob's promise to Jean. Then Jim ran into Tom Holly.

Twenty miles lower down Jim steered his canoe over into the quiet water along the bank, and Tom got him. Tom was half dead and all crazy with privation and scurvy and that thing that the dead white loneliness puts into a lone man's wits. Jim heard the report of the revolver; after that—there wasn't any "after that" for Jim.

Tom caught the canoe when it drifted into the bank and unloaded it. The hard lump in Jim's belt went into Jean's little canvas bag with Bob's five thousand. Jim went into the river, but Jim's grub stayed ashore.

Tom hadn't seen so much food in two months, and Tom was too far gone to realize that five pounds of salt pork was far too big a meal for even a healthy man. A week later, Bill Homan ran into Tom. He buried him.

Then with Tom's light poke and Jim's hard lump and his own few raw dollars resting on Bob's five thousand in Jean's little bag, and stowed safely away in one of his packs, Bill imagined that he could run the rapids just because the water was higher than it was when he came up the year before. And when the water went down a few days later, Snake, the French Canadian Indian—Poker Snake they called him at Kelly's—waded out among the rocks and dragged ashore the two big packs that stuck up out of the river; but he left the body where the current had wedged it between the rocks.

Snake was heading in with a year's work in a tobacco bag, but when he opened the packs and Jean's little bag he decided on a trip to Nome. Man proposes; Carl Mack saw Snake when he pulled into Kelly's:



CARL always sat on the landing when times were bad. If he saw them going out with the money it was because he didn't see them coming in with the dust. When he saw Poker Snake

coming in with the water lapping in over the sides of his canoe, he felt in his pocket for the hand-picked deck of cards that he relied upon as a fulcrum to his fortune and helped Snake unload.

That night Kentucky Jean—Bob's Jean—looked for Snake when she sat down at the piano in Kelly's. Snake was the first man in and maybe . . .

"He just came out of the bank and went down to Carl Mack's," they told her.

Jean swung her gun out of her lap and leaving the piano walked out the mile to Carl's. There was a scraping of chairs on the floor inside and Carl called—

"Come in!"

Then Snake closed the door behind her and stood leering at her. Carl bowed low, sarcastically.

"Ah, the Widow MacLeod!" he smirked, pulling her out a chair. "And to what am I indebted for this kind visit?"

Jean looked from one to the other of them, her heart in her throat. "Widow" MacLeod? Was Bob——?

Then it was a good thing that there was none of the yellow clay in Jean.

That little canvas bag that she had made for Bob, that she had penned his name on—she had cut it out of a piece of striped ticking—there it was full, sitting on the table beside the cards.

Jean had learned by her father's death not to ask personal questions in the lands of necessity, but she must have an answer to the question that that bag stung into her tongue. She swallowed the lump in her throat and reached into her pocket for her wallet.

"Got a night off and the games down there are all full!" she complained, hardening her voice to hide the tremble she imagined would be in it and pulling her chair up to the table. "What's the ante?"

SNAKE looked at Carl and Carl chewed his lip for a moment. Carl gambled for a profession and he didn't like too many on the job when he was working. Then he nodded his head and sat down.

"It's a five-dollar game and that's the limit." And he pointed to her wallet.

SNAKE sat down and picked up the cards.

Jean watched the cards when Carl dealt them and smiled. A .32 revolver was all that stood between her and a red wolf on the one side, and a yellow-haired, gambling gun-fighter who always leered at her on the

other, and the door was locked; Snake had locked it behind her when she came in. Yet she smiled and watched her chance to swing her gun up into her lap unnoticed when the deal came to her, then:

"Better throw that deck in the river!" she suggested, wiping her hands on her skirt within a few inches of her revolver. "They're too greasy for me to handle." And she shoved them across to Carl with her elbow.

Carl frowned, one of those arrested frowns that finish in a professional smile, and reached into his pocket for another pack, but Snake beat him to it.

"Always ver' pleas' to 'comadate a lady," grinned Snake pulling a pack out of his coat, "even so she be what you call dainty of the hands." For Snake was well pleased that Carl's deck had been called out without any suggestion from him. And Carl let it go.

But the new deck didn't change the luck; small pairs and an occasional lone ace was all any of them could get out of it. The pot had over two hundred of Jean's in it when Snake finally opened it. Jean didn't know what he opened it on, and she didn't care, as long as her three aces took it. Then the luck changed suddenly and Carl began to win.

Jean glanced down at her dwindling funds and started to crawl; as long as that streak stayed with Carl, it took three of a kind on the deal to make her stay for the draw, with the result that she seldom lost anything but her ante and won an occasional pot.

Two hours later, when Snake went broke and the little bag she had made for Bob changed hands, she was nearly five hundred to the good, but as yet that big question remained unanswered. Neither Carl nor Snake talked unnecessarily.

SNAKE's bad luck riled his unreasonable temper. He saw his trip to Nome end with that last losing hand that he threw into the discards. He eyed Carl viciously.

Carl leaned back and rolled a cigaret. His idea of sport was to add insult to his victim's chagrin.

"You're forgetting the game, Snake," he sneered sarcastically. "You used to be able to stay all night on less than you brought in this time."

SNAKE was getting wilder all the time; he was boiling when Carl finished counting his winnings.

"And you worked a whole year for eight thousand dollars?" jeered Carl, shoving the money aside with assumed disgust. "Worked a whole year—or did you steal it?"

Then Snake let go. He jumped to his feet and grabbed up the little canvas bag that Jean had made for Bob, empty now it was.

"No!" he roared savagely. "I no work for her! No! I no steal her! Again I tell you I find her! Again I tell you with a stiff in the river I find her! See!" And he threw the bag straight and hard into Carl's sneering face.

Carl didn't move—just his hand shot up at the end of the table. A flash of flame leaped between them. After that Jean couldn't see Snake; the table was in the way.

Jean picked up the little bag. The "stiff" in the river that Snake spoke of finding with the bag must have been Bob—her Bob. She turned the mouth of it out and found his name that she had penned on it. Her big question had been answered: Bob was dead! Bob had died trying to keep his promise to her, for there was the bag come back with.

She glanced over at the money in front of Carl and down at the five hundred she had won and her faith in Bob clinched itself.

Carl leaned over and jerked the bag out of her hand. He had seen the name inside. There would be the usual inquest into Snake's death, and Snake had said too much in front of Jean. Jean would be there and evidence like that must be kept out of Jean's hands, must be destroyed.

"It goes with the money," he growled half apologetically, "and the money's mine, ain't it?"

"No!" Jean jumped angrily to her feet. "The money's mine! That's Bob's bag!"

Carl grinned and with a half pull on the trigger threw the empty shell out of his revolver.

"Yours?" he railed. "Yours! And how were you figuring on getting it?"

Jean glanced at the revolver hanging suggestively in his hand and slipped over into Snake's seat.

"The same as you got it!" she challenged, picking up the cards. "And we'll raise the ante to ten dollars?"

Carl slid the bag on the edge of the table

at his elbow; he was quite agreeable. Jean had five hundred of the money that he hadn't got, and all of a thousand of her own.

"The lady has the say," he bowed affectedly, "but—" he laid his revolver on the top of the bag and reached into his pocket—"we'll use the 'too greasy' cards!"

Jean's face paled, her hand slid a few inches on the table toward her lap, but Carl's hand hovered with the cards just an inch above the still warm gun on top of the bag. She forced a smile and licked up the cards he dealt her. She had demanded a continuance of the game and Carl's handy revolver enforced silently the use of his pet deck. It wasn't compulsory that she play at all, but there was none of the quitter in Jean. Then, too, Bob had promised to bring back ten thousand dollars in that bag, and there was the bag and—and her faith in Bob told her that Bob would keep his promise.



FOR three hours Jean sat there with Snake staring up at her with those awful lifeless eyes, the crookedest gambler north of the Fifty-third watching her every move, and staking her last dollar on cards she knew came out of a marked deck; yet her faith in Bob never wavered. When Carl dealt she crawled as she had when he was winning the money from Snake, refusing to open it at all and losing her ante.

When she dealt she would frown when she looked at her cards, bet him five or six hundred and stand pat or draw two and laugh at him when he refused to stay or called her. When daylight began to sift in through the window she had won half of the money away from him and had put a raw edge on his nerves.

Suddenly he stopped and began to count his winnings, a proceeding against all usages of the game in a game that is still working, and a sure sign of lost nerve. Jean watched him and her hand slipped into her lap.

"It's getting kind of cold around the feet?" she insinuated sarcastically. "Snake must be nearly frozen. Why don't you build a fire?"

Carl's eyes blazed.

"I'll just do that!" he snarled, cupping his hands and pushing his every last dollar into the pot. "There's five thousand for one hand without a draw! Cover it?"

Jean looked him full in the eyes for one long minute, looked at him sneeringly to get his rage up to the boiling point, to make him forget caution; then she laid her arm on the table and pushed every dollar of her money beside his.

"That's raising you a thousand," she came back, mimicking his bombastic tone of voice. "But we'll let it slide and—"

Her hand shot up out of her lap.

"We'll use Snake's deck!" she snapped.

Carl looked down into the barrel of Jean's revolver that yawned at him over the edge of the table and went white with rage. He had been caught asleep in a game of his own. And by a woman! Then slowly the color ran back into his face, the color of disgust, and he nodded his head. He was too angry to speak.

Jean reached across and, dropping his gun into her lap, pushed Snake's deck over to him. She couldn't shuffle with one hand.

Carl mixed them and Jean cut, then he dealt and just the shadow of a smile crossed his face. Jean searched that smile.

Was she to lose it all now? She was half afraid to look at her cards. She stood up to have lots of room.

Very slowly, one at a time, Carl laid down his cards.

The first was the trey of clubs. The color started to come back into Jean's face. The second was the trey of spades. The third was the duece of hearts. The fourth was the ace of diamonds. That was one pair anyway that she had to beat, and Carl had one more card. What was it?

He turned it over and laughed exultingly—it was the ace of clubs!

Two pairs, aces high. Jean's chances were about one in a thousand.

Then, one at a time, Jean turned her cards over.

The first was the nine of diamonds and the second was the five of hearts. The gun in Jean's hand trembled a little and Carl laughed, but she pulled herself together with a jerk and turned over the third card. It was the ace of hearts. Jean smiled again. The fourth card was the ace of spades. Carl quit laughing.

She had just two chances now. If that last card was a nine or five she would have two pair, aces high, the same as he, but her second pair would be nines or fives while his were treys—plenty to beat him.

With her breath caught in her throat

she turned that last card over. It was another ace of hearts!

There were five aces in Snake's deck.

Jean looked Carl straight in the eyes.

"Three of a kind!" she sneered, exultingly sarcastic. "And three of a kind beat any two pair you ever saw!"

"Yes!" Carl exploded. "Three of a kind and a gun!"

Jean stepped aside to be clear of the table.

"It was that that beat Snake and Snake's crooked deck!" she jeered, and pointed to the bag. "Pack all that money where it belongs—in Bob's bag, then unlock that door!"

Carl shot one last long vicious look at the yawning gun in Jean's hand and did as he was told.

Down in her room at Kelly's two hours later, Jean sat up on her bed and dried her eyes. Bob was gone and—and the supply boat would be going down in an hour. She would be on it and it wouldn't do to have red eyes.

She got up and, washing her face, picked up the little canvas bag that she had made for Bob and dumped it out on the table. Jean's sand was practical; she had to face this thing, and though it was hard, so very, very hard.

She swallowed the lump in her throat and counted the money.

Jean didn't know how it had been collected, of course, so she counted it all together.

There was the five thousand that Bob had dug out of the hole in the side of the hill behind his shack. There was one thousand that Jim King had had in a hard little lump in his belt. There was five hundred that had been Tom Holly's. There was one thousand that had belonged to Bill Holman, and a thousand that Snake had worked a year for. All told: eight thousand, five hundred dollars, which, with the one thousand, five hundred that had been Carl's stake, made just ten thousand dollars.

Jean counted it again and again, and yet again. There was just ten thousand dollars. Not a dollar more or a dollar less, just ten thousand dollars in that little canvas bag that she had made for Bob.

"Bob, my Bob!" she husked softly. "You kept your word, didn't you? You promised to bring back this, didn't you? You're dead Bob, but that couldn't stop

you, could it? You kept your word, anyway."

And "up the river," two hundred miles as water runs to Kelly's Landing, on the top

of a hill behind a deserted shack, a round skull bleached white in the sun. Above it in a tree a heavy belt encircled a limb and swung empty in the wind.



Patrick & Terence Casey

Authors of "The Story of William Hyde," "To Crack a Safe."

CHAPTER I

THE VOICE ON THE WIND

WE WERE four. Fitzhamon was an Irish aristocrat; Koenraad de Jong, a Dutch orchid-chaser; I, Colum Kildare, a ne'er-do-well from San Francisco; and our boss-boy, Harry Christmas, a big liver-hued negro and a deserter, to boot, from the cavalry wing of the United States army.

We went orchid-hunting together up into the bush of Borneo. De Jong was our captain and paymaster. He had a commission from Mrs. Manasseh Jones, the widow of the millionaire automobile manufacturer of Detroit, Michigan; a commission to secure, in particular, some of those unutterably red orchids which grow only in the dark of Central Borneo and which are called "The Blood-drops of Deewa."

De Jong had picked up Fritz and me in Banjermasin, in Malay Muk's cosmopolitan pub. He had offered us billets as hunters with him. And we had jumped at the offer—we who were men on the beach at the time

and would steal the very food off a Chinaman's grave. He was our first piece of luck in years.

Where De Jong had come across the negro Harry Christmas, is more than I can guess. Harry was supposed to have jumped over to Borneo from the Philippines where he was rather wanted. He was easily the smoothest and crookedest article in ebony you could find in a day's journey anywhere, not even excepting the Georgia Black Belt, the place where he was born.

We had been up in the Borneo bush two months now. Hunting orchids is hard, back-breaking, leg-wearying work. After a day's tramping, and climbing into the overgrowth, and bush-fighting, a man is too weary even to think. We used to sit and stare into the fire and smoke for hours without a word.

Ofttimes, Harry Christmas, an inveterate crap-shooter, would rattle the dice enticingly in his big right hand, and talk and laugh heartily when he gained his point. We were too weary to play a main. Sometimes we would call up the Lon Wai bearers to amuse us with such hymns as they were

taught in the mission school of Moara Kaman, or to dance in the fashion of the *Orange Benua*, the head-hunters of the jungles. Generally of nights, however, we kept to our own part of the *campong* and the Dyaks to theirs.

It was one such evening. Christmas, failing to lure us into a game, had put by the dice in an unconcealed disgust. We sat now and smoked and blinked about the fire of dry *padalai* wood. Around bulked blackly the sleeping-sheds, the kitchens, the drying-houses for orchids and the rough palisade of bamboo.

The Lon Wai boys were down by the river, crouched in a ring or standing stately as sheeted ghosts in their long white *puahs*. About and around the little encampment hedged the black mystery of jungle.

Minutes had dragged by since the last word had been spoken. In that time, the sun had shot down behind the tree-tufts of the dense jungle on the opposite bank of the Barito, and now that broad slow flood no longer reflected the gold in the sky. The cheep of the sunbirds had faded away, the monkeys had forgotten to jabber and the hot droning of bees and butterflies big as birds, which had held throughout the day, had ceased as abruptly as does a sawmill at five o'clock. All the jungle reaches held a quietude abnormal.

The little Dutchman, Koenraad de Jong, broke the silence. He plucked his pipe from his lips and, shaking his sun-toasted head, grumbled:

"Un orchit-hunter—oof, vot a bizness! Dese orchits is all sick mit bum colors. Dey is redt as der plood of you und me, und dem redt vuns I calls 'Der Plooddrops of *Deewa*.' Und sumdimes dey is yellow as poison or der toads, und speckled like der small-pox, und green as der vater snake, und white as der leprosy or der dead. Dey is all sick mit bum colors. Dey is nasty. *Mein* friendts, I tells you sumdings. I bick no more orchits for dot Missus Shones of Dedroid, Michigan, U. S. A. Dot's so. I go after sumdings bedder dan orchits."

He drew from one pocket of his khaki jacket a squareface of gin, unscrewed the metal cap, and drank.

"*Mein Kamerads*," he said, wiping his lips, "I tells you I go after sumdings bedder dan orchits. Dot's so. I go der Green, Green *Gott* for. Und haf a trink, poys?"

Slowly, extending the squareface, he

looked about the circle of sitting figures out of eyes that from much straining through sun-glare had contracted around the corners of the lids into a network of fine wrinkles. No one accepted his offer nor so much as spoke. He turned his puckered monkey eyes upon the negro.

"You remember him, Harry, *mein* friendt der Green, Green *Gott*? Id is der *gott* of der primidive cavemans of der Jallan Batoe. Dot Field of Stones is only two days' journey from here up der Barito. Id is a mountain mit a grade hole in der insides which is filled mit grade stones. Der primidive cavemans vot lives dere is called der Poonans, und dey is golden-skinned, nod prown. Dey is dot light gold hue from der living in der dank caves of der stones hidden from der sun. Dere vimmins is der brize, der Golden Vimmins! Bud dere *gott*, der Green, Green *Gott*, dot is der grader brize. My Dyaks says id is der single emerald in der form of a barrot!"

A gust of wind tore, all at once, through the high overgrowth of the jungle. I could hear, from all about, the thudding of dropping bread-fruit melons, of rotted twigs and of *durian* oranges. And then on the heels of it, swelled up, back in the lush, a prolonged piercing wail. For moments on end it hung, shrill and vibrating, in the night air; then slowly thinned away. It was the hunger cry of some jackal.

De Jong's eyelids folded back painfully wide. He shivered.

"Der cry like der vimmins! Id is der chant!" he exclaimed. "Der chant vot I heard last night und der night pefore. Der chant from oudt in der jungles. Der chant of der living vords—*Mein Gott*!"

"What chant?" asked Fitzhamon, afoot, his hand on the Dutchman's quaking shoulder. "What's the *soesa* (trouble), man?"

But De Jong had the squareface glued to his lips and was swallowing greedily, his throat apple moving convulsively up and down.

Fitz come back to me.

"I don't get this at all," I whispered.

"Oh, he's drunk," said Fitz as he sprawled out again. "He's been drinking all today. And men always talk of the Poonan, their Golden Women and Green, Green God when they're drunk."

"Trunk is id!" came sharply from the Dutchman. "*Nein, nein!* I swear I heard dot chant, der very chant of vords. I show

you. I remember dose vords. Dey was a regular singsong, der formula vot you calls id, der chantey of vords like der sailorman's. You don't belief dot, but I didn't mean to tells you. I hardly belief dot meinself. Bud I show you how trunk I am. I tells you what dot chant says."

His wrinkled parchment lids closed over his bleary eyes and, out of memory, he repeated:

"Went Jallan Batoe. Went roundt und roundt und up der Barito to der Jallan Batoe. Und den sumdings, den sumdings, belief me! Saw der redt, redt rupies in der Rope of Holies. In der Jallan Batoe. Saw der rupies und der di'monds und der beards und der emeralds in der Jallan Batoe. Und der Gott, der Green, Green Gott! Und den sumdings, belief me——."

I was sprawled out immediately next to De Jong. Well abruptly now, I reached out and grasped his arm. The squareface of gin between us was slapped upon its side by the action, and the liquor spilled out with a gurgling noise upon the trampled *cogon* grass.

"Stop!" I said.

That was all. But in my head a picture had snapped into a film of recollections and now that film was reeling like a movie before the eyes of my mind.



I SAW a huge monolith of man standing, sweating naked to the waist, before the colossal gilt-man-tled statue of Kamehameha the Great. A thick red beard—a beard so preposterously red it was almost the color of blood—ringed like a ludicrous dog-collar his saffron moon of a face. On his deep chest was moistly pasted a gorilla-mat of flaming hairs. And cocking itself upon his stark sun-saffroned shoulder was a red-eyed parrot, Mogul, one intense shimmer of green.

He was William Hyde—William Hyde, the shell-and-pea man, as I had seen him, six years before, in Honolulu. And it seemed to me that his great-veined hairy hands were shifting and shifting the three halves of walnut shell. And it seemed to me that all the time, from out the depths of that red dog-collar of beard, he was singsonging continually this uncouth rigmarole:

"Went Jallan Batoe. Went round and round and up the Barito to the Jallan Batoe And then some, then some, bee-lieve me! Saw the red, red rubies in the Robe of Ho-

lies, in the Jallan Batoe. Saw the rubies and the diamonds and the pearls and the emeralds in the Jallan Batoe. And the God, the Green, Green God! And then some, bee-lieve me—*cluck, cluck!*"

"He's up there," I said. "He's back in the Jallan Batoe with the Green, Green God and his Golden Woman who was Marshal Queen of the Poonan. It's six years gone since I saw him, six years——"

"Who has der emerald got? Who's up dere?" asked De Jong. "Got der Green, Green Gott," he added, blinking. "Grade *Himmel!*"

"William Hyde," I answered.

Whereupon I told De Jong and the boss-boy the story of William Hyde as he had told it to Fitz and I, six years prior, in the fo'c's'le of the tramp *Fairhaven* when she was lying-to in an isle-dotted inlet in the *kona* coast of wild *Kauai*.

How Hyde, at the same time an orchid-hunter, had chanced upon a mountain, an extinct volcano, while stalking orchids here in the lush of Borneo; and how, upon climbing some way up that mountain, he had stumbled upon a tunnel which led in into the crater of that extinct volcano where was the Jallan Batoe or Field of Stones of the Poonan.

These Poonan were, I explained, a golden-skinned people, even as De Jong had said. They lived in caves in the huge stones which bestrewed the floor of the crater. They were a remnant of the Tartars of Genghis Khan who, seven hundred years before, had conquered the most of Borneo. They were a people who, through seven hundred years, had suffered no Dyak, Malay or Boegis of Borneo ever to enter their unique country. No white man, save and excepting Hyde alone, had ever entered their country and lived to come out. The Poonan were a people ethnically pure.

But Hyde had been allowed in because his hair was red, his beard was red and his eyes were blue. Such had been the color of the hair and eyes of Genghis Khan. For it appeared that a tradition was current among the Poonan to the effect that a descendant of that great Tartar emperor would some day come to rule over them and that they should know this descendant because his hair would be red and his eyes blue, just as Genghis Khan's hair had been red and his eyes blue.

Accordingly, without doubt or qualm,

they had accepted Hyde as that traditional descendant. They had brought him to their great temple, the Stone *Dobo*, inadvertently related to him their history, dazzled his eyes with the splendor of all their prodigious treasure, and then, with a deal of ceremony, had made him their *Toewan Orlok Raj*, their Great Marshal King.

Lip-Plak-Tengga, a sylph-formed, blue-black-haired, slant-eyed and wondrously beautiful Golden Woman, who was High Priestess of the Poonan, had fallen in love with Hyde. But Hyde had fallen frantically in love with the green-eyed, golden-haired *Orlok Radenajo* or Marshal Queen of the Poonan, Golden Feather of Flame. Her he had kissed in the temple before all the foregathered Poonan and he had made her thereby, according to the quaint Poonan custom, his wife and queen.

Thereat *Lip-Plak-Tengga's* love had poisoned to hate. Through craft, she had conveyed into Hyde's hands the Green, Green God, the greatest treasure of the Poonan. It was a single emerald, precisely as De Jong had said, carved into the life-size and lifelike form of a parrot. It was that particular Emerald Parrot which once had stood on the back of the Peacock Throne of Shah Jehan, the Mogul of Delhi, but which now was a god of awful dread to the Poonan.

Hyde who had entered the Jallan Batoe expressly to gain possession of that shimmering emerald treasure, now as king and husband no longer wanted it. With the aid of his loyal wife, he thrice attempted to return to the temple that god.

But *Lip-Plak-Tengga* had confounded his purpose. She was implacable in her hate. She wanted the Poonan to learn that Hyde had the dread god in his possession, whereupon she knew they would think he had stolen it from the temple and rise up, in their dread of the god, against him. To keep Hyde powerless to return the god to the temple, to make assurance doubly sure, she called up to her aid a creature of awe and mystery, even to the Poonan—a creature known as the Monster Man.

When Hyde, alone and in terrible desperation, had attempted for the third time to return the god, the Poonan, of a sudden, had risen up against him. Hyde and his wife immediately had sought to flee to the outside. They had sought also to carry the Green, Green God with them as a mea-

sure of revenge against the priestess and the Poonan.

They had distanced the pursuing Poonan; they had reached indeed the tunnel in the mountainside when, to the chilling of all their hopes, they saw, barring the way, *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, so haughty to command, so heartless in her hate. They knew then. The Monster Man was somewhere close.

Hyde's wife, thereat, had sacrificed herself for him. In an endeavor to appease the priestess, in an effort to save Hyde from the Monster Man, she had run with the Green, Green God back into the arms of the pursuing Poonan.

But no word nor hand did the priestess lift to call off her Monster Man. Hyde faced that Monster Man, a fiend preterhuman, a brute stupendous—an orang-utang over seven feet tall. Hyde fired twice. Bullets had little or no effect on the tremendous bulk of the ape.

With his long, heavy-thewed, hairy arms, he grasped Hyde about the middle. He hugged him close, so tightly he broke Hyde's right arm. He hugged him close, so tightly he almost disemboweled Hyde. Then, as from a catapult, he hurled Hyde from him, through the air, twenty feet in a parabola, slap down upon the hard lava floor.

When Hyde had come to consciousness, he had found himself outside the crater. He had made his way, through a terrific storm, down the mountain-slope to the Loeang, a branch of the Barito. Here he had stumbled upon the Dyak boys with whom he had come into the jungle to pick Coelogyne Lowii orchids. He had been gone less than a week. He had been in the Jallan Batoe only three nights and two days.

He had tried to get back to find his wife. But the tunnel had been choked by a landslide, directly resulting from the terrific storm. Every couple of years he had tried to open up that tunnel or in some way carve for himself a passage into the Field of Stones. When I had seen him in Honolulu, six years before, with the parrot, Mogul, on his naked shoulder, he had been banking a shell-and-pea game in order to raise enough money for a last forlorn try.

"That was his voice you heard, De Jong," I ended. "The very rigmarole he babbled in Honolulu before the statue of Kamehameha. Even to the indescribable clucking," I hazarded, and I gave a rather poor imitation of Hyde's *cluck-cluck!* with which,

by striking his tongue against his palate, he always had brought his rigmarole to a conclusion.

The Dutchman nodded energetically.

"Shush like dot," he said. "Id was shush like dot."

"You heard that, too?" I persisted, hardly able to credit that I so exactly had hit the nail on the head. "Then, for sure, it's William Hyde!"

Fitzhamon had been watching us narrowly. It was quite disconcerting. Fitz was a handsome fellow, with the handsomeness of his features ineffably ennobled by evidences of experience, of sorrow, and of that rare faculty of thinking for oneself. He was some ten years older than I, about thirty-six, lithe and strong. His eyes were gray, sometimes sparkling, sometimes somber, at all times penetrating; his face was lean of jaw and as firmly chiseled as it was finely chiseled; his head high in the brow with plenty of back. A short curly fell of hair, black and glossily alive as polished jade, covered wavingly and completely that head, save near the temples where showed, on either side, a dignified grizzle of white hairs and black.

To be watched narrowly by his penetratingly gray eyes was to have the uncanny feeling of being under the revealing lenses of an X-ray. You felt uncovered, shorn of all fleshy deceptions, viewed to the soul and the secrets of the soul. And you never could tell what bit of incisive reasoning might come out of that curly fell of hair.

Well, just now, in an emphatic dismissing manner, he tossed his head.

"You're daft," he said evenly. "De Jong's drunk and you, Colum boy, you're plain daft. The Jallan Batoe, if it be where Hyde said it was, is some two days' journey from here up the Barito. It's in the center of a mountain, walled about by high lava cliffs. Now then, explain how Hyde's rigmarole can be heard all this distance away."

"Maybe it came on the wind," I returned. "As the bird flies, the Jallan Batoe is not a great many miles away. Following the winding Barito makes a difference."

"But the Singing Stones," Fitz argued quietly. "Remember the Singing Stones, those large stones in the caves of which, according to Hyde, the Poonan live, and those very stones which, in the cooling breaths of the night, thrum like a vast singing with the exhalation of the heat they

have stored up through the hot day? Winds are impartial, you know. Did De Jong then hear that singing also?"

I turned to the Dutchman. But he was no longer listening to us. He was listening, intently, to something else. His head was cocked to one side. His eyes were wide. The puckers about his eyes were smoothed out from their old wrinkles; they were folded back into new and unaccustomed wrinkles. His eyes were that widely open. They were staring, appop.

The attitude was contagious. I cocked my head. I listened.

Tore through the overgrowth of the jungle, for the second time that night and all of a sudden, a noisy gust of wind. The trees shook their long arms and dependent creepers, and there was altogether a great to-do of rustling and whistling. And distinct in all the sound, borne on that wind-gust, came the words:

"... and round and up the Barito to the Jallan Batoe . . . then some, bee-lieve me! Saw the red, red rubies. . . In the Jallan Batoe . . . and the diamonds. . . And the God, the Green, Green God. . ."

The wind died away, and the words. We remained motionless as in a spell. Presently another stirring of the atmosphere, fainter than before, feathered high through the *rhuk* and again, as from faraway, came the words:

"And then some, bee-lieve me—*cluck, cluck!*"

Galvanized, I leaped afoot.

"It's he!" I exclaimed. "There's no thrum of Singing Stones, but that metallic clucking proves it. It's that drunken shell-and-pea man and no mistake. It's William Hyde. He's won back again into the Jallan Batoe——"

"Und dey got him." De Jong was blinking up at me. "Der Poonans got him!"

"They got him." It was my thought. "The golden rats!"

The sunbaked little Dutchman arose to his short and tottering five-feet-five. He grasped my right hand. His puckered monkey eyes, watery from the effects of the gin he had imbibed, bleared into mine. He shook my hand.

"I see vot," he said. "Dot chant, id was der calls for help, for der assisdance. Id was indended for der ears of a vhte mans, for *mein* ears."

I caught his trend of thought. So did

Fitzhamon. He eyed me oddly as he spoke.

"But your orchids, Conrad," he objected mildly. "You have a commission from Mrs. Jones to bring the blooms and dried bulbs across the seas to the United States. A crate of Dendrobium bulbs, a gross of Cypripedium and Vandacea blooms, a number of bird-like Phalaenopsis moth-orchids and, in particular, those white 'Flowers of Mercy' and red 'Blooddrops of God' which Mrs. Jones hopes to breed, by cross-fertilization, into new garden hybrids with motes of red on petals of ivory, like warm blushes on a girl's fair cheeks."

De Jong continued to shake my hand.

"*Himmel*," he said dismissingly, "Missus Shones, she don't know noddings of dot sickness of der nasty orchits, und I tells you I go after sumdings bedder dan orchits. Orchits withers und dies; nod so mit emeralds—"

He caught himself. He broke off.

"I go after der white mans, der Vilhelm Hyde."

His grip tightened on my hand.

"You und I," he said. "He was a *burongulan*-chaser, doo, you says; a chaser of dese pirds of der jungle, dese orchits, like me, Koenradd de Jong. Und six years up dere in dot deffel-deffel blace, hidden from der sun, mit all dose golden rats. Mans, dot's up to us to go after him as der—der white mans!"

Fitzhamon's voice sibilated to my ear.

"See; do you see? He's throwing away rare orchids—a boatload of 'em—and a commission writ in gold. He's the official orchid-hunter for Mrs. Manasseh Jones of Detroit, Michigan. And he's throwing away that commission and all the orchids—two months of slavish, insane work. For what? Ask yourself that, Colum boy. The rescue of an unknown white? Magnificent, lad; but you and I have been too long on the beach, cadging for drinks, to believe that."

The boss-boy slouched up upon his bare flat assymmetrical feet. He was a big liver-colored negro, as has been said, about thirty years of age. His sleek satiny skin glistened in the firelight, naked to belt and guiltless of hair. He was tricked out only in a United States cavalryman's rakish service hat, shoved back on his woolly head, and a pair of riding-breeches once an olive-drab, which buttoned tightly about the calves of his bow legs.

He was, all in all, a most peculiar type of negro. His nose was not depressed, flat, wide at the nostrils. His was a high, thin, almost Semitic nose that fell, without notch, with only a slight arching, straight from the forehead. His lips were not thick nor protruding. They were full, red and rather well-formed. They could tighten, on occasion, into a thin line. Even his skin was not black. It was the darkish red-brown of liver.

To judge from all this, Harry Christmas was a breed; a breed of the African and the Arab.

His voice was, to be sure, truly African. Whether rolling up through the walls of his throat in hearty laughter, whether swelling out from the deeps of his chest in some ludicrous camp-meeting song of the American negro, always his was a rich-toned, African, beautiful voice. But the fact remained that there was more than negroid intelligence, indeed a positive sharpness of intelligence, in that very sharpness of his nose.

"Mistah de Young," he said now in his beautiful voice, "Ah raiken Ah'll go wid yo' as de boss-boy ob de party. Dat call am a call foh me, too. Dis heah Willyum Hyde, he knows Ah'm only a niggah an' a — ornery niggah at dat—a lazy, crap-shootin', psalm-singin' son o' de lost tribe ob Israel. But he knows mah heart am white. An' he knows Ah'm big an' strong an' a fightah what done learn mah fightin' wid Uncle Sammy's boys 'gainst de Igorrotes an' Gugus an' Ilongotes daown Luzon an' Panay way. An' Ah'm gwine, boss—"

"Dot's right, Harry, *mein* friendt," interposed De Jong, at last releasing my hand and nodding his sundried head. "Und Harry, *mein* friendt, I tells you sumdings. You be bum *mandoer*, bud you be goot poy, all right. Haf a trink?"

He stooped to retrieve the overturned squareface. But Fitz was before him. We all were afoot by now, all save Fitz. Fitz took one long smacking draught of the squareface, then he too got afoot.

"Yes, I'm going," he said. "It will be the four of us. Only—" as gratification showed, no doubt, on our faces—"I'm no Galahad, nor am I a Don Quixote. I'll tell you plainly what I'm going in for. Yes; and what you're going in for, De Jong, and your negro boss-boy, too. I'm going in, men, for the Green, Green God!"

CHAPTER II

THE DUTCHMAN AND THE NEGRO SHOW
THEIR HANDS

Keep a-inchin' along, keep a-inchin' along;
 Jesus will come bime by.
 Keep a-inchin' along lak' a pore inch worm;
 Jesus will come bime by.
 'Twas a inch by inch Ah sought de Lawd;
 Jesus will come bime by.
 An' a inch by inch he blessed mah soul;
 Jesus will come bime by.

THUS sang Harry Christmas from the deeps of his bare chest as he worked with his weight on the long steering-sweep aft. We were making up the Barito under the sun of the following day. On all Dyak boats, you must know, it is customary for the boss-boy to sing rhythmic songs, the rowers joining in the chorus, the while they keep time with the strokes of their paddles.

Our Lon Wai boys up forward did not know the verses of these imported darky camp-meeting songs to be able to join in the chorus; but now and anon they whooped or called echoingly and plaintively, and all the time, in a uniform sharp *tr-rup*, they beat with their short paddles against the sides of the *prau* in splendid time to the measures of the hymn.

For the rest of us, there was little to incite singing. Indeed it was otherwise. Trouble was brewing quickly. From that chill hour of the morning when he cast overboard, among the fenny reeds and low mangroves on the bank of the *campong*, the crates of dried orchid-bulbs and the earth-packed roots and rhizome of hardier blooms, De Jong had persisted, through the day, in mouthing an endless refrain that was like an undertone to the monotonous songs of the negro:

"Orchits lives der short dime, und den dey withers, und den dey dies. All der life dies. Bud emeralds—emeralds don't dies. Dey is always green, always."

A piece above the *campong*, the jungle broke on one hand and opened into the Green Swamp. Here a dead forest draggled its knarled and leafless limbs. There was no undergrowth save vast stretches of moss which coated the steaming ooze and girdled the decayed trunks in green—clammy, crude, aching green.

"Alvays der mossy green und der miles deep mit color like der still jungle," said De

Jong. "Orchits withers; jungles dies; bud emeralds don't dies. Dey glow der green as der moss. Green und green."

It was that eternal litany. Added to the monotonous overtone of the negro's songs, it irritated us. And, you must know, irritation to men alone in the jungle may lead to grave consequences.

Remote in a world of hot, steamy gloom where millions of growths are always fighting to live in a terrible death-grapple of depraved mindless things, in a horrible silence that is broken only by the weird sounds of animals, their cries and their howls, one loses one's perspective and little things loom, big. Tempers grow, ferocity germinates, restraint becomes boundless exasperation, and brutality is paramount. To life thus detached in the dark places of the earth, there is ever lurking near the grim possibility of murder.

It was three o'clock. The heat was lessening. We were lying out on the high bamboo poop-deck aft of the fourteen bronze and bending rowers and almost beneath the long arms of the boss-boy, as he sang and manipulated the great steering sweep. De Jong was tireless and tedious. Fitz winked at me and then, as if to break the flow of that eternal litany said—

"By the bye, Conrad, when we get that emerald, how shall we divide it?"

"Share und share alike. We'll turn id into gold. Dere's four of us. Dere's you und Colum, und Harry, *mein mandoer*, und *mein self*."

"And Hyde," suggested Fitz.

De Jong fingered the drooping point of his black Vandyke. Finally he nodded.

"Und Hyde. Dot's five alretty. Dot's all."

"But the fourteen Dyak boys. You don't forget——"

"*Himmel!* Dere'll be noddings left for——" He broke off. "Oof!" he snorted. "Don't pother me."

He rolled over on the deck and lay there, his short, hunched body bearing a remarkable resemblance, now, to a toasted and twisted peanut. Suddenly, above our heads and with redoubled energy, Harry Christmas burst out into a new hymn:

De Lawd tole Noah to build him an ole ark;
 De ole ark a-moverin', a-moverin' along—
 De ole ark a-moverin', a-moverin', a-moverin';
 De ole ark a-moverin', a-moverin' along.

Den Noah an' his sons wint to work on de dry lan';
De ole ark a-moverin', a-moverin' along—
De ole ark a-moverin', a-moverin', a-moverin'; —
De ole ark a-moverin', a-moverin' along.

There were a score of verses, relating how the ark was built and how "de proud began to laff an' de silly p'int de fingah." The boss-boy sang them all. The while minutes telescoped into one another and the lush, to either hand and overhead, reeled by in never-ending, never-changing procession. After a spell, from somewhere back in the lush, a monkey coughed loud and hackingly.

"A monkey with a cold!" I exclaimed.

"Maybe it's consumption," said Fitz. "They get that sort of thing here, you know, in this warm dankness."

De Jong was lying hunched upon the deck, as I said, like a toasted and twisted peanut. Well now, all at once, without making a move, he began speaking:

"Dey cough und dies shush like mans. Efferyding in der sweat-soaked jungle dies—orchids und drees und der apes. Bud emeralds don't dies. Sun, dime, weather, noddings makes no difference to der emeralds. Dey is always green, always——"

"Listen, Conrad," interrupted Fitz, his gray eyes sparkling as with a novel thought. "When we get the Green, Green God, who'll carry it out?"

De Jong remained as he was. Only he shrugged the one shoulder that was off the deck.

"Oh, me or—or anybodies. You, or Colum, or even der poss-poy."

"So?" said Fitz. He winked broadly and with impunity across the Dutchman's form at me. "Well, I'll settle it for you, De Jong. I will be the one to carry it out."

The Dutchman snapped erect. His wrinkled monkey eyes were opened wide. And perhaps it was from the effects of the gin he had been drinking daily for the last two months; or perhaps again it came through selfishly coveting the Green, Green God; but in either case, I noticed in his eyes, now, a peculiar look that was like the harassed look in the eyes of an animal sorely beset, the wild look in the eyes of a man crazed.

"Nod you, nod you!" he fairly shrieked. "I vill carry id *mein* self!"

I motioned Fitz to quit baiting the man. That look in De Jong's eyes was not good to see. But Fitz must have misunderstood me.

"Come, come, Conrad," he persisted. "You have to help the white man, William Hyde, remember. I, Fitzhamon and no one else, will carry the emerald out!"

The act was unaccountable. Full upon Fitz, with a horrid kind of fury, the little Dutchman leaped.

Flat on his back went Fitz. The Dutchman was upon him, his face distorted, his fingers outreaching, crooked and working. The Dutchman tore at his khaki jacket, at his blue woolen shirt, at his chest and neck. He tried to tear out his eyes with his fingers. He was hideous with fury.

Fitz smote the sun-toasted fellow full in the face—smote the little fellow again and yet again. The puckers about the Dutchman's eyes swelled into two red pouches; he could hardly see; yet frantically he persisted. All the while, as he struggled beneath and struck and squirmed to get altogether free, all that while Fitz swore low and continuously.

Fitz was, of course, the stronger of the two; he easily could have bested the orchid-hunter in a stand-up fight; but postured as he was, flat on his back and striking upward, he was at a disadvantage, his blows lacked force. He caught at the tearing fingers of the Dutchman. They eluded him. He fell to grabbing at the Dutchman where he could and as best he could.

His woolen shirt was all torn in front into shreds by then, and he was bleeding freely from the many ragged scratches the Dutchman's nails had ripped in the skin of his chest, neck and face. He swore unceasingly. He got a clutch on the Dutchman's shoulders. He pulled the Dutchman down upon his chest in order to render useless his gripping fingers.

The fight resolved, now, into a sort of wrestling match, without rules, without thought of fair play. De Jong's short legs flew into the air. He began kicking. Fitz hugged. He never forgot to swear. He squirmed to roll over on top.

The Dutchman was abominable. Such was the intensity, the utter insanity of his fury, he essayed even to bite. Fitz sought only to get the fellow beneath him, his legs and arms pinned to the bamboo slabs of the deck, his insane fury impotent and wasted.

Locked in a ghastly embrace, the men rolled about the deck with every pitch and swerve of the *prou* as it rounded the bends.

Their legs became hopelessly entangled. Fitz put a quietus, by this means, upon the kicking tactics of the other. But the other had worked his right hand, somehow, up to Fitzhamon's throat.

Fitz held on to the shoulders of the Dutchman. The Dutchman's fingers pressed into his throat, tight, terrifically tight. Fitz held on. His face was drawn, gutted of blood, stark with a pallor, death-like, almost blue; with the awfulness of his agony, his mouth was sagging open, wide and wider, his breath coming not at all. Yet Fitz held on.

A cry from forward drew my eyes away. The two rowers immediately in the bow were afoot. They were waving their short dripping paddles.

"Ak, ak!" they were crying. "Narrows ahead. Bad, bad! Keep to the center of the stream. Midstream, midstream, *man-doer!*"

I darted around the cabin and into the waist. Up-stream, not more than one hundred yards up-stream, the river appeared to narrow and darken into a sort of murky tunnel. Here, I knew, the Barito had altered itself, in coming down, into a new channel; for shouldering the water aside in midstream, rising haphazard here and there like natural columns, I could glimpse a number of great trees, the branches and foliage of which formed overhead, from bank to high bank, an arcade so thick, so wanton with parasitic growths, that it was impervious to the stinging shafts of the sun.

I shouted a warning to the boss-boy as I turned around. The shout died half finished. The negro had not heard the Dyaks, he had not heard me. It was not because he still was singing. Since the fight began, he had left off singing. It was because he did not know!

There were narrows ahead, not now one hundred yards ahead; there were great trees to be circumnavigated; there were the lives of all of us in his hands—and he did not know. He was sickeningly engrossed in the struggle that was going on behind the cabin and beneath him. His hands on the haft of the long sweep, more from habit than from any attentiveness of mind, he was leaning over the two squirming men.

I ran aft. Well, as I did, I saw that his eyes were alight as with a crafty gleam. They were brilliant as the eyes of a lynx.

I rounded the corner of the cabin. I saw Fitz atop the squirming form of De Jong. The color was back in Fitzhamon's face. He had the Dutchman's two arms pinned, powerless to move, against the bamboo slabs of the deck.

I saw further. I saw that the boss-boy's right foot, the bare flat foot of the negro, was raised as in a posture of attack. He was about to kick Fitz.



I SHOUTED with anger against such treachery. I sped toward him. And then things happened in a flash.

The bare right foot of the negro met Fitzhamon's head with a sort of squashy thud. Fitzhamon's head dropped, like an overripe coconut, upon the squirming form of the man beneath him. A spasm of commingled surprise and pain convulsed the lean Afro-Arabian features of the negro. He let go the tiller, doubled up, clutched with both hands the stubbed toes of his bare right foot, and hopped about in a dance of pain on the other leg.

The *prau*, lacking the steady guidance of the sweep, lurched with the current toward the left-hand bank, like an ill-broken horse balking at a bit. I saw Christmas go down in a heap. That very moment I felt myself flung outboard.

I grasped at space. The next instant I was overside, immersed in the Barito, struggling, choking, sputtering and being dragged away by the current from the boat.

I made to seize the gunwale two feet above me. It was as if I essayed to seize a streak of lightning. The *prau*, propelled up-stream by fourteen paddles, flashed past; the current drew me down-stream; all in a breath, we were separated by a goodly distance. I struck out for the nearest bank, the left-hand bank, the while, quite lustily, I shouted:

"*Pu ai, pu ai!* Turn back, turn back!"

I was calling thus, in Dyak, to the Lon Wai boys. But the fourteen bronze bodies continued to sway back and forth; the short paddles continued to beat against the sides of the boat in a uniform sharp *tr-r-up*, and the boat itself continued on and away.

I saw, as I watched and swam, the negro hobble to his feet and grab the long pivoting haft of the steering sweep. The *prau* steadied against the current and rapidly overhauled the narrows. It entered the

tunnel. It disappeared into that murky tunnel as completely and suddenly as a parcel disappears into a pneumatic tube.

I was making hand over hand for the bank. But the current was sweeping me down perceptibly faster than I was swimming across.

With a force of collision that drove all the breath out of me and cut me cruelly, I brought up, all at once, against a log. That log was moored in the stream, like a ship riding at anchor, by the weight and dripping tentacles of a clutter of freshwater growths. Somehow I managed to hang on.

Thus hanging on, my breath was coming back and I was casting over my fix, when I became aware, as from faraway, of a rich-toned voice, booming:

We'll inch an' inch an' inch along;
Jesus will come bime by.
An' inch an' inch till we git home;
Jesus will come.

All sound of singing faded away in the dead heat, and I realized, thereat, that my first happy hunch was wrong. The *prau* was not putting about to take me aboard. The *prau* was nowhere to be seen. It was going on without me.

What had gone forward aboard that *prau*, I feared to guess. Fitz, my only friend, was out, unconscious. That I had seen. But whether he were still aboard that craft or had been heaved overside as food for the crocodiles, I little knew. I only knew that De Jong and his negro had shown their hands—and won. They were in full possession of the boat. Now, verily, could the negro afford to sing.

Up I got upon the slippery log, and out toward the bank I leaped. I made six feet at the least, thus. Then, swimming hard, the current pulling me along, I drew in a diagonal way to the bank.

CHAPTER III

UP THE RUNWAY OF THE HEAD-HUNTERS

I CLAMBERED up the lush-grown and slippery face of the bank by aid of a creeping variety of palm, stout as a cable. I caught, as I did, from somewhere in the trackless expanse of jungle beyond, the peculiar note of some insect. *Kink-a-dink, kink-a-dink* it came, and it was like the distance-dulled hammering of some

blacksmith, now beating upon the horse-shoe, now beating upon the anvil.

The Lon Wai boys of our crew had explained to me, once, that this was *Salam-pandai*, the god who created men, at work hammering out more and more men on his hidden anvil. In all the twilight reaches of jungle, so humid and so oppressively still, it seemed the only sound.

It filled me with a sense of my aloneness. Indeed was I alone—entirely, utterly alone—in that jungle of mystery and fear, of fecundity and swift decay, and of naked pigmy men that skulked through the growths and sought to take the heads of other men. To Fitz and De Jong and myself, buoyed up by the strengthening companionship of one another, the months in the sticky twilight had been trying enough. To me now, this business of being left all alone to shift for myself or rot to death in that dank bosque of nameless terrors, was fast changing me into a miserable mechanism of starts and fits.

I had to keep a firm hold on myself. And to keep a firm hold on myself I had to be about and doing something.

My .32 revolver had got wet in that plunge into the Barito. Now, to keep it from rusting, I cleaned it with my bandanna. The bandanna also was wet; I could clean the gun only after a fashion. But it was the best I could do in a jungle that sweats. I returned the revolver to its holster.

I cast into the crannies of my brain, then, for what next to do. In another day, our party had planned to gain the confluence of the Loeang with the Barito. There we were to leave the *prau* and strike out northeast toward where we supposed the Jallan Batoe to be. I thought of trying to make that junction-point of the two rivers.

I realized, withal, that my progress through the pathless wilderness would be slower, of necessity, than that of the *prau* with its fourteen stout Dyak rowers; but I reasoned that, should I hold a course through the *rhuk*, due north and paralleling the line of the Barito without following its innumerable convolutions, I might make, at that, almost as good time as the craft. I hoped that Fitz, if he was still aboard, might somehow get the upper hand once again; or that he might recall De Jong to sane reason; and that, as a result, they would wait for me in camp a day or two, at the junction of the rivers.

The upshot was that I started on in a general northerly direction. And I walked upright where the brush would give, or crawled on all fours over that brush where it would not give. They say a monkey can go from end to end of Borneo—from Fort Alfred to Koemai and from Sarawak to Pasir—without once touching the black spawning ground, because of the countless creepers and mosses that, like a vast ship's rigging, link and hopelessly festoon the jungles.

I acted the monkey. I swung on dangling lianas over fallen trees, over treacherous morasses, over banking walls of lush that would have dulled the edge of a fine steel sword had one tried to hack a way through.

I was creeping, presently, over a bed of brush. All at once I heard a low twanging thrum. Something *zipped* through the air. I felt a sudden chill in my left foot. I reached down, hastily. The sole of my army shoe had been carried away, completely and as cleanly as by a cobbler's knife.

My digestive organs bunched with apprehension in my stomach. Outspread, full on my face, I went. And I managed to cover the dark and sweating growths with my small revolver.

I have taken pains to speak of the oppressive stillness of the jungle. Well here, in that awful wait, the jungle seemed clamorous with noises: Sunbirds cheeped high up in the overgrowth; beneath me, the brush crackled as I sunk into it; and all the while quick stealthy scurries beneath me told of the presence of rats. From a little way off came the dull lap-lapping of the Barito, and rising and falling, on every hand, like a great overtone, was the incessant giant song of insects.

Unexpectedly, in sweeping the revolver about, I felt to one side the tufted end of an arrow. It was embedded deep in the thick trunk of a *bilian* tree, just above the corded roots. It still was quivering, quivering elastically, from the impact with which it had struck that bole of tree. Had I been erect and walking through the brush, instead of crawling over it, it would have impaled me, no doubt, through and through.

I pulled at it. It gave. But only after parting from its head. Then, cautiously, gun in hand, I crawled from the ironwood tree over the bed of brush toward the place from whence I judged that arrow had come.

I pressed aside, here, a screen of entangled growths. There behind that screen, affixed to a stout *tamadac* or jackfruit tree, was a bow so massive no one man could have bent it.

The string of it was the heavy catgut from some jungle animal. Feeling along that string, I uncovered a procumbent creeper, thin and strong as wire, which lay over the top of the brush like a slinking snake, and which had released the taut bow at contact with my moving knee.

I was aware, in a jump, of several things. It was the arrow from that hidden spring-bow which had torn away the sole of my shoe. That bow was a trap, a cunningly concealed device of the *Orang Beuna* or savage head-hunters. And if, as I had heard, the *Orang Beuna* only guarded in such cruelly careful manner the runways they pursued through the trackless jungle, then of a surety, near at hand must be one of those sunken paths.

I turned about to seek out that runway. With the act, a crossbill that had been pecking industriously with its twisted mandibles at a tree within sight, rose on wing and fanned as in fright past me. Right on the back of that, too, I noticed, some way off, a movement in the underwood. I watched that movement near. Where the bed of brush ended in what appeared to be a wild tangle of trees and ferns, on the sudden a man stepped out.

He was brown as bronze and not over five feet tall. A pigmy man, his long black hair, thick and coarse as horsehair and shiny with animal fats, hanging down his back, and upon his low forehead, a ragged fringe of hair, bleached white by the ashes of woodfires and tied out of his small close-set eyes with filets of rattan fiber. His eyes lacked brows and lashes. These had been plucked out, hair by hair, giving his eyes, as he came quickly forward, a very staring, furtive, wild-animal appearance.

The entangled growths that had formed a screen for the spring-bow, now formed a screen that concealed me. Upon the appearance of the head-hunter, I had jerked myself back against the *tamadac* tree, back behind the screen of entangled growths. Through the interstices between those growths, I continued to peer out.

The fellow wore a *jawat*, a narrow long strip of native weave, wound round and round his middle, the ends hanging down

loose between his legs, one before and one behind. Across his bronze shoulder and flapping down to the top of the *jawat* was a broad strip of skin, padded with dried leaves as a protection, I surmised, against the thin ten-inch-long *langas* or poisoned darts of the blowgun.

He himself did not carry a blowgun. I judged from that he was no ordinary head-hunter. True, his very garb showed that. The skin across his chest was not, for instance, the rather common hide of the tree-tiger. It was the skin of the *pehang*, the black-spotted leopard; to the natives of Borneo, a sacred animal.

Another difference about him was his elongated ear-lobes. Those ear-lobes sagged down to his shoulders under the weight of earrings composed of huge round blocks of *bilian* wood and scraps of fine iron which is to be found abundantly in Central Borneo. Also, he was bedizened with armlets and anklets and bracelets of crocodile teeth, dried seed pods, coils of thin rattan, and narrow strips of wild animal hides.

He was armed with a heavy curved *mandau* or head-hunter—a sword, bearing upon its hilt a long tassel of human hair. That sword was carried in a sheath of some soft wood, from the extremity of which depended still another tassel of the human hair of victims. The length of those tassels really showed his rank. Among the *Orang Benua*, according to my knowledge, the longer the tassels of human hair, the higher in rank is the owner.

The tassels he possessed were so long they trailed upon the ground. He was some *tuai rumah*, I argued from that, some headman of a Dyak long-house, some chief of a Dyak tribe.

He was a cause of fear to me. I thought for an agonizing moment, that he had overheard, a trice prior, the low twanging thrum of the spring-bow and was come, now, to investigate. But instead he skirted the edge of the bed of brush, moving very fast in the direction I had been holding, his small and close-set eyes shifting under the barren frontal bone from side to side, quick and wildly, like an animal's.

His head disappeared below the top of that bed of brush where the runway he pursued sunk lower. After a little, I could hear no rustling of the growths as he passed between, no sharp snap of twigs as he sped over them. After a little more, the cross-

bill came back and set industriously to work where it had left off on the fibrous bark.

My heart had quieted by that time. Indeed, it throbbed no whit faster, now, than that crossbill pecked. I had myself in hand.

Wherefore, I began crawling over the brush toward where I judged that runway to be. Half-way across, my hand came in contact with the sole of my shoe which had been torn so cleanly away.

I thrust that shape of leather into a hip-pocket where already reposed a flask of De Jong's gin. Then, at the edge of that bed of brush, I dropped into a path which would have been indecipherable to me, had not the tall *cogon* grass within it been trampled down, so recently, in spots.

The path sunk low and lower. Twenty feet on, and it widened also. It ran in the same general line as the Barito flowed. In fact, for aught I knew, it may have been the former course of the Barito. Save for the waist-high *cogon*, it was comparatively free, now, of undergrowth. I began striding up that runway, full in the sandal-prints of the head-hunter chief.

That very instant I was hopping about on one foot. The other—the one with the sole of its shoe lacking—I clasped with my hands.

I was experiencing a new and exquisite torture. The runway had been ingeniously protected from unwelcome feet by a myriad of thorns fixed, like pins, in the black muck. Those thorns had penetrated the ball of my unshod foot.

I hopped from spot to spot. On the steep right-hand bank of the runway, I brought up finally, sat down in the whispering grass and, with my clasp-knife, extracted from that foot as many as a half dozen of the painful points.

I tore off a strip of my hickory shirt from the neck down across the bosom. As I always left the shirt open in the insufferable heat, I would never feel the loss of that strip.

I drew out the sole of leather from my hip-pocket. Winding the strip of shirting round and round that sole and the instep and toe of the shoe, I affixed that shape of leather to the bottom of the boot. Then, rather gingerly on the sore foot, I'll admit, I trod forward again. And I only hoped that those thorns had not been dipped in poison.

 TROPIC night spilled over the jungle, swiftly and suddenly, and as black and viscid as a run of tar. The foliage and fungoid growths, more intricately interlaced than any lattice, blotted out overhead the purple sky and any moon or stars which it may have held. Beneath all was black, a thick tarry blackness that I almost could feel.

In time, as actually I cut through that blackness, there appeared ahead, to one side of the runway, a shape that bulked blacker than the black shapeless night. It was a long-house of the Dyaks. I paused. For an indeterminable period I watched colsely that house.

No light of torch or fire showed. Summoning up courage, indeed a recklessness that was more than courage, I stepped out before it. Then, chancing all, I hallooed—

“*Jadi rumah?*”

That is the customary question asked ere entering a Dyak house. It meant, “Is the house free from taboo?” That is, “May I walk up into the house?”

There was returned, from the dark of the house, no answer. With that recklessness which I marvel at now, I mounted the *tanju*, the long uncovered veranda running alongside and for the whole length of the house.

Striking matches on the corrugated end of my German silver match-case, I explored that *tanju*. I found paddy spread out upon the flooring to dry, clothing made from the inner fibrous bark of the *pendok* and *barnu* trees hanging about on ropes formed from creepers, and whetstones and dye vats under the eaves. There were no men.

In the *ruai*, it proved the same. There, in the cool of that public hall, which was just like the *tanju* save only that it was covered with a *nipa* thatch, were weaving frames, partly finished plaited mats, fireplaces still warm to the touch, but no men. Lifting the row of mats which gave, on one side, from the *ruai* into separate rooms or family *biliks*, I saw all signs of recent residence, but never a sign of men.

The house was cursed and abandoned of men. Or perhaps it was that the chief I had seen skulking through the jungle, had been hurrying to this very long-house to warn his tribesmen of some sudden attack from another tribe, some untoward happening. Certainly all evidences pointed to a panicky departure by the former inhabitants. Over the open fireplaces of the

ruai, where the Dyaks usually keep their most valued treasures, still remained the most of those valued treasures.

There were greenish *gusi*, *rusa* and tall *naga* jars, ancient earthenware vessels which the Dyaks prize almost religiously. There were hair-ornamented shields, *mandaus*, scabbards, and *tolors* or quivers containing the long thin darts for the blow-pipes. And in one fireplace of a family *bilik*, boarded round, the airholes choked with clay and shelves made within like steps in a chimney, I found, quite by chance, fish dried by the smoke in one shelf, firewood in another, rice cooked in a tube of bamboo in another, and, in still another, a smoke-cured human head.

I examined that head. The skin was shriveled by the smoke of many wood-fires into a kind of leathery yellowish parchment through which the bones stood out. The hair had been severed close to the scalp and was gone to decorate the shield and sword-hilt of the warrior who had brought down this human quarry. Large dried leaves covered the sunken hideous eyes. And the brains had been scooped out, either through the occipital orifice at the hind part of the head or through the gaping cavities of nostrils. Those brains had been eaten by the abysmal head-hunters, I knew, in a heathenish horrible attempt to acquire the attributes of the slain owner.

The presence of that head was conclusive evidence. Surely enough had the head-hunters quit that house in haste and panic. For to leave behind a human head is, among the *Orang Benua*, to leave behind a prize of incalculable value. It is the one unmistakable sign of their bravery in battle, their cunning in stalking. It is the symbol of their religion, of their whole business of life.

What had been beneath that panicky flight, whether they would return soon or not at all, of course I did not know. There might even be a head-hunter or two spying upon me from the loft or *sadou* overhead where sometimes, in large families, the maidens sleep. I went up a ladder into that loft. I stumbled over tools and stored sheaves of paddy. I burned many a match. I disturbed only rats and stinking bats.

I feared, when I came down, to light a fire. I split open that bamboo tube I had found and ate some of the stiff mold of rice within, and some of the smoked freshwater

fish. I washed all down with mouthfuls of gin from my flask. I discussed a cigaret then, the fire of its end a dancing mote of red in all the blackness.

Mayhap it was the sleep-inducing qualities of the gin, or again the soothing effects of the cigaret, but in any case I became aware, quite suddenly, of a great feeling of weariness. And I was weary. I had been struggling through the growths for what seemed to me an æon, and now, after the sweating heat of the morbid jungle, there was that about the cool and quietude of the house which appeared, truly, to invite rest.

I piled several plaited mats atop one another upon the *niboung* flooring of the *ruai*. One I cast over me. I looked at my watch in the light from the cigaret. The case had proved water-tight; for all the immersion in the Barito, the watch still was going. It showed, now, three-quarters after one o'clock.

I laid my little revolver beside my head as a measure of security and defense. Then, after a bit, I sunk into a slumber that was troubled, weirdly, by big liver-colored negroes, head-hunters whose furtive eyes lacked brows and lashes, Dutchmen who leaped and scratched, and pecking cross-bills that never stilled.

CHAPTER IV

JUNGLE MADNESS

I AWOKE at length. The mists of dawn, breathing into the long-house, had chilled my limbs. I got afoot, shivering. I went without the house upon the open *tanju*. There, about and about, everything was darkly gray.

A dark grayness cloaked my mind. All in a heap I realized what extremity of recklessness had prompted me to sleep in that stronghold of the head-hunters, what luck had attended that sleep. I shivered anew. I cared no longer to put that unparalleled luck to the test. I was in haste to be away.

I started on, still shivering. The mists veiled the runway like gossamer. After a little, come of the motion of walking and the resultant warming of my body, the shivering spell left me. After a little more, the gossamer of mist lifted. Then, on the heels of that, a faint stirring in the jungle, somehow different from the aspects of the night, as if for all the truth nature was

stretching and yawning after its black sleep, betokened the rising of the sun.

I could not see the sun. The lattice of leafage overhead shut out all but a few dashes of light. Yet I could hear, from all around, a string of animal calls.

There were the notes of the tiny mouse-deer, the call of the *kijang* like the short sharp ringing bark of a dog and, as it sunk into daytime sleep, the cry of the *saat*, the smelly night badger, which was like the yawn of a dog as it opens its jaws to bark. Monkeys began jabbering, as if in a frantic attempt, by this means, to get warm; trees straightened their heat-bended limbs with sharp snaps; and birds, gaudily plumaged, winged by and shrieked.

Slowly, ever so slowly, the dark gray of the jungle lightened to a dim dank fresco, made stark here and there by stray shafts of sunlight. And I became aware, as of a sudden, of the vivid red of blood-creepers and loranthus, the pure white of convolvulus blooms, the purple of thorn apples. Back of them all, in perpetual procession, was the rich leek-green of grasses and mosses and ferns big as trees; the jungle itself, an entity overwhelming and morbid.

I breakfasted in a slag-pocket, deep in the runway and clear for the space even of *cogon* grass. Above, the runway rose in a series of small terraces where formerly, when the Barito had coursed through here, there had been rapids. The action of the water, pounding down through the years, had washed away the strata of loose mold at the foot of the terraces, until had been uncovered this immovable stratum of volcanic slag.

I breakfasted on *rawa-rawa* and *cho*. These were jungle fruits which I had shaken down from trees and bushes. The *rawa-rawa* looked like a head of burdock. Inside was a small edible plum with a flavor slightly more acidulous than that of red currants. The *cho* resembled an apple, and tasted like cranberries. Both were pungent to the palate, so I relished indeed the white warm milk from a large ripe coconut which I had knocked down from a tall palm and plugged promptly with my clasp-knife.

I did not tarry. All day I wormed in and out with the convolutions, the endless turns and twistings, of the runway. All day I broke through underwood, or swung on skeins of coilers like a monkey, over uprooted trees and beds of impenetrable lush.

And I made fair progress. I had covered, in fact, some half dozen miles ere once more night swooped down, black and thick and oppressive.

I paused not for sleep. I made shift at dining by eating the remains of the fruit I had stuffed into my pockets. I pressed on. I pressed on in the fond hope of overtaking Fitz and the half-crazed De Jong and the treacherous negro *mandoer*. I wondered, the while, how Fitz fared, now that I was gone and he was alone, if he were alone, against the Dutchman and his boss-boy. And again I felt fear for Fitzhamon's safety when I reviewed the fact that no *prau* had put back to find me.

I thought then of all the insane expeditions which had preceded ours in the try to get into the Jallan Batoe. They all had come to some bad end. There was Hyde, for one; Hyde, as I had seen him in Honolulu, standing, sweating, naked to the waist, the finger-prints of the Monster Man like blue ragged scars to either side of his umbilicus, the green parrot, Mogul, perched atop his sun-saffroned shoulder against his red dog-collar of beard—Hyde, who had been so harassed by recollections of the Jallan Batoe and of his Golden Woman who was *Orlok Radenajo* of the Poonan, that he had been pulled, as by a leash, back into that Field of Stones.

I wondered, too, what trick Hyde had resorted to, in what manner he had preyed upon the superstitions of those terrible Tartars that, after six years, he should yet remain alive in the Jallan Batoe. Was he still the Great Marshal King of the Poonan?

I did not know. I only knew that, according to Hyde, the Poonan never had seen a parrot other than the Green, Green God; there were no live parrots of any species in the Jallan Batoe; and I could only suppose that Mogul, with his uncanny resemblance to that Green, Green God, had served Hyde as the means to fool the Poonan. Hyde had spoken of that scheme when, in the fo'c's'le of the tramp *Fairhaven*, he had finished the telling of his story.

The thought now served to remind me of Hyde's description of the Green, Green God and, also, of De Jong's incessant morbid litany which had caused the fight on the *prau*. Of a surety, I thought, that Green, Green God must be a wonder of the world. A single emerald, as had been repeated so

often to me—a single emerald, one foot long, carved marvelously into the lifelike form of a parrot!

Again I saw that emerald parrot as it once had clung, two toes before and two behind, to the Peacock Throne of Shah Jehan in the Hall of Private Audience in the Mogul's Palace at Delhi. And then I saw it as Hyde had seen it—on a gem-studded shield, surrounded by balls of fire, in a vast cavern hewn out of a monster white boulder. I saw the smoke columns of those balls of fire, the very flickering of their light upon the shimmering green of the emerald and upon that gleaming galaxy of jewels on the mahogany shields all about. I tell you, I saw all those colorful jewels—a wild rainbow of crimson and amber, turquoise, copal, jade green and cobalt. And my eyes felt dazzled by all that reeling array, though I was, mark me, in the sticky blackness of everlasting jungle.

Too long, altogether too long, had I been all alone in that sentient and insatiable jungle where the sweating growths flapped their wet feelers across one's skin and the heat was such as to thin the skull over one's brain! The jungle had sort of "got" me. The solemn stillness, the close unceasing gloom, the bewildering tangle of growths, the sweat-soaked heat, but more than else, the awful stillness, had warped my mind. I lacked ballast and balance. My mind was become a breeding-house of fancies and vagaries as wild as any opium-eater's.

Believe me, then, when I say that I saw about me now, in all the blackness, a troop of horsemen. Uncouth men they were, bedight in stiff hides of buffaloes, with long black drooping mustaches, small eyes, leathery skins. Some rode with a foot-soldier mounted behind on the crupper, a few with women and clinging children. All were armed with long bows and arrows, curved *mandaus*, shields, maces with leaden heads, and slender lances.

They were Tartars, those very Tartars from the loins of whom the Poonan had sprung and about whom Hyde so graphically had told me. They were the remnant of that great expedition of Genghis Khan which, hundreds of years prior, had moved down upon Borneo from China. Now they had suffered defeat at the hands of the Dyaks of the coast. They were sadly depleted by hardships, by the grisly diseases of the jungle. They were questing on for a

place of refuge—for that place of refuge, the Jallan Batoc.

Before, behind and all about me, up the black sunken runway, they trooped. Worrying their rear, like so many dogs, were the pursuing Dyak^s; ahead was terror in the form of the ferocious head-hunters of the bosque. No time, nor any arrows, had they to spare to shoot down the animals of the jungles for food. They sustained themselves on sheep's puddings of blood, carried under their saddles, and become coagulated and cooked by the friction of the rubbing saddles.

They seldom paused, rarely dismounted. Ever they remained in the saddle, without sleep, vigilant. Night after day, thus, I seemed to see them.

The last of their sheep's sausages of blood was gone. They had eaten even the intestinal coverings. They lived, now, on the milk of the mares, the blood of the horses they rode. They dismounted, opened veins in those horses and drank the blood as it spouted into their mustachioed mouths; then closed the wounds with some rhubarb plaster they had brought with them from their native land where it grew.

They pressed on. And always, as they pressed on, I saw, at their head, the Green, Green God. Always in the van, pointing the way.

Of course, that thought was an anachronism. The emerald parrot was not cut and polished from a single huge stone until centuries later, and then in India. But the jungle night, as I have said, and especially the jungle stillness, had played havoc with my imagination. Even time was without weight to me. It was a thing of no duration, fleeting as a breath. I seemed to live on and on, through days and centuries and eras.



THUS, an odd quirk of my mind's eye, and suddenly before me showed the Jallan Batoc as Hyde had found it, seven hundred years later. Here were the great stones bestrewn the lava floor of the crater, carved like exaggerated animals, and whelmed about by fruit trees and palms and cultivated growths. Here, in the caves of those stones, lived, racially pure, without suffering any outlander to enter, the descendants of that Tartar troop, the Poonan.

Out of the caves, as at a call, stepped the

Golden Women, a woman from each cave-mouth. And they were beautiful, even as Hyde had said. Regal and willowy as orchids. Starred with eyes, brown and resplendent, and so large and liquid one could swim in them. Crowned with tresses, blue-black as hyacinths of Peru. Smoothly olive of complexion, with a gilt as of gold over all, like the golden glow on the sheaths of ripe mangoes—as if, indeed, the damask of their skin had been besprent with the very dust of gold. Lips that were red, redder than red loranthus, a rich succulent red, seductive, luring kisses, inviting to bite. Transparent of twinkling toes, arched of tiny foot, dainty of gold-bangled ankle, slim of waist, delicate of features, budding of breasts, tall and graceful—nymphs marvelously, esthetically beautiful.

I saw Hyde's Golden Feather of Flame. The one woman with hair red as raw gold, with eyes green and dazzling as turquoises. I saw *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, the High Priestess, with her slant eyes; eyes that were downy with passion, that laughed now, that taunted again, that ever lured. I saw her lips red as a wound. She put out her hands to me. Even as she once had done to Hyde, she made to touch my hair.

Actually I felt her hands. They touched my face, clammily cold. I shivered and brushed those hands aside. They faded from my mind's eye. Yet I continued to shiver. Something like the damp shroud of some corpse was sweeping my face, a wet thin cloud of moving droning things that battled against my skin and seemed to fall off dead.

I struck a match. All about me in the dank air a myriad of insects floated. Mosquitoes they were, strange tiny pinolias, gnats with long moving feelers, and flies wet, countless and unspeakable. The match did not burn itself out. Those untold insects clung to it and formed over the flame a perfect hive of teeming life that quenched the flame as under a cap-extinguisher.

I made shift, in the warm creepy blackness, to button the torn shirt across my chest. Jerked abruptly out of my vagaries, I was now in the throes of a shivering, sickening disgust. I had lost my hat, a light well-ventilated Stetson, the day before when I had been flung overside into the Barito. Now, as never before, I felt the need of it. In lieu whereof, I wrapped

about my head the soiled bandanna with which I had cleaned my revolver. That protected me from those bugs clinging and nesting in my hair.

I pushed on hastily up the runway through that sticky unseen swarm of gnats. If anything, as I pushed on, that swarm grew thicker and louder with dronings. I hardly minded them.

I knew a river was near, a sluggish river or a swamp, the stagnancy of which had spawned all those unspeakable wet flies. If a river, it well might prove to be the Loeang, at the confluence of which with the Barito I had planned to come upon Fitz and De Jong and the negro boss-boy in camp. I pushed on, stout now with the hope of meeting them.

CHAPTER V

LIKE APPARITIONS IN A DREAM

AND THEN, all at once, I came upon a natural theater. It was broad and level, and yellow with the first moonlight I had seen in two days. Around the edges of the theater, where the jungle was throwing out its encroaching tentacles, *cogon* grass sprouted high and wild; in the center, the ubiquitous *cogon* was trampled down, as by many feet, into an uneven yellowish-green carpet; and here, in the center of the theater, a clump of bamboo shot its stalks fully thirty feet into the air. Nothing stirred save the multitude of flies which walked upon the grass and rose and settled in the moonlight.

Directly across the theater was the broad expanse of a river, noiseless and sluggish and flat as a river of oil. It appeared to be, at this point, some fifty feet wide. Wherefore, I took it right off to be the Loeang.

I thought, now, to scan its shores up and down, on either side, for the light of a camp-fire. That would denote, in all probability, the presence of De Jong, Fitz perhaps, the boss-boy and the Lon Wai crew. I made toward that river.

The clinging gnats rose from and about me at the action, in a damp buzzing cloud. I had covered, swiftly, a third of the distance across that theater when I heard, from behind me in the jungle, a great rending sound. I halted dead.

A huge russet-haired monkey, with a long

flesh-red nose, came pitching in a wild wabble, out of the jungle. Arrived in the center of the theater, he scrambled up two of those bamboo stalks there, as up a ladder. They swayed dismally under his weight. Fifteen feet up, where they began to taper, he caught hold with his hands on a couple of the panicked knobby joints of the stalks. There he swung, gibbering frenetically as if terribly affrighted.

I, too, was affrighted. Some movement of man or beast had sent that proboscis monkey skyhooting out of the jungle. I swung about. I swung about as if Death itself were flitting out upon me from that jungle. And again the wet gnats rose from me in a vast cloud.

I made out, back in the jungle, what seemed to be a string of fire-flies. They were far back, bobbing up and down, weaving slowly toward me. I watched them in a kind of fearful fascination.

I heard, presently, the single cascading bellow of a war-conch. That bellow galvanized me, leaping through my frame as electricity leaps through a conductive filament. I raced across the theater, pell-mell for the river.

Those bobbing lights were torches. They were the resinous torches of head-hunters. The bellow of the war-conch convinced me of that. The incessant gibbering of the fear-crazed monkey lent speed to my stride.

Ere I reached the river, I plumped down, flat in the tall *cogon* to one side of the theater. I was paralyzed with an overwhelming fear. Had the head-hunters seen me? Would they see me, if I kept on? And if I kept on, would not the ears of the *Orang Benua*, keen as any ferine animal's, catch the tattoo of my speeding feet?

What to do, I did not know. I lay concealed by the tall *cogon*, sweating and shivering in every limb like an orchid shivering in a wind.

The gibbering of the monkey shrilled up into a nasal shriek. The torches were very near. Of a sudden, the monkey leaped down, full fifteen feet, and wabbled from side to side in headlong flight for the river. As he pitched by me, I heard his teeth chattering in his head as if with cold.

Never had I seen or even heard of a monkey swimming. Well now, I caught a loud *flop* from the river, and I beheld that monkey swimming actually and with violent haste for the other shore.

Quick as I was to look back again toward the jungle, the man that stepped out of that jungle was quicker. When I glimpsed him, he was through the welter of *cogon* grass and striding forward full in the moonlight. And he was *jawat*-girted, draped over the chest by a sacred *pehang* skin, furtive of eye, lacking of brows and lashes, and be-dizened of ears and person with many barbarous ornaments. He carried at his waist in a sheath, a heavy curved *mandau*, and both *mandau* and sheath were tasseled with human hair. He was that selfsame head-hunter chief who had passed me the day prior in the lush.

After him, bearing the torches, came a round score of head-hunters. They pegged out through the billow of grass like a bevy of quail, their heads bobbing, and the fringes of whitened hair on their foreheads dancing with each downput of their flat, grass sandaled feet.

They were brown as bronze. Not one was over five feet tall. All wore dangling *jawars* and, across the chest, padded skins of tree-tigers, jackals, monkeys and other animals of the jungles, lesser in value than the sacred *pehang*.

In their right hands they carried *sumpitans*, nine-foot-long blowing-tubes of hollowed ironwood; at their waists were quivers stalked with darts, and gourds containing the *buas* or pieces of pith which are attached to the ends of the darts so that they may fit snugly the bores of the *sumpitans* and be blown by the breath; while, in their left hands, each man grasped a *kliau* or heavy wooden shield, ornamented with patches of human hair.

A man, weaponless and even shorter than the others, brought up the rear. He was that squat and yet long of arm, he looked like an ape. He was garbed like a participant in a Saturnalia. His long, black and shiny hair was encircled by a wreath of blood-creeper, some of the pods big and green, others in monstrous dirty-red blossom. From slits in either ear projected the brilliant feathers of omen birds of the jungles. Strung fold after fold about his short stout neck was a necklace of diamonds, uncut and raw, yet glittering savagely in the light of the moon.

He was some sort of *manang-mansau* or witch-doctor. In one hand he carried by the hair three human heads, as yet uncured by smoke. Two were the heads of white

men, the fleshy parts of the neck still attached, the skin mortifying to a hideous blue. The third hung low, almost trailing the grass. Swelled and darkly yellow, like a clod of resin, it dangled from a long braided cue—the head of a Chinese.

Even as the wet flies were settling down upon me then, even so, I thought, had Death settled down, suddenly and silently, upon that brace of white men and the Chinese servant. They may have been seekers after ebony, big game, geological specimens, orchids, antimony, diamond pits, camfor, ethnological knowledge, gutta-percha. They may have been insane seekers after the Green, Green God of the Poonan. It was no matter, now. The head-hunters had got them.

Would they get me? Had they seen me? Had their keen senses told them of my presence? I lay motionless, at full length in the grass, my head lifted like a cobra's; failing to breathe, watching in a sweat through the tall *cogon* stalks.

The pigmy men, armed with *sumpitans*, were humping themselves on their hams, each upon his *kliau* and all in rude rows back from the central clump of bamboo. The chief and ape-like witch-doctor stood before the rows of squatting men, to one side of the bamboo clump and facing the river.

On the sudden, without uttering a syllable, the chief lifted one arm—a tattooed shaft of bronze. Instantly, as at a signal, five of the head-hunters leaped to their feet, ran forward to the bamboo clump, and lowered their torches to the trampled *cogon* grass immediately encircling that clump.

There was a monstrous crackling, then a continuous roaring. The air seemed to dry up with unbearable heat. Those bamboo stalks burned like a tall bonfire, in a single gigantic flame. The open theater, the palisading jungle, the thick river and thicker air, were lighted all at once by a fiendish red glare.

About the blazing clump, wildly, the five head-hunters danced to the one-beat of the hollow tomtoms in the hands of some of the squatting Dyaks in the rear rows. I sensed a reason underlying that wild dance. The five head-hunters were dancing thus in order to trample to extinction under foot any stray sparks which might fly about and set fire to the *cogon*, and thence to the rotting jungle and their wattled homes therein.

The chief stood by and looked on, as at a play, with shifting lynx-like eyes, and with arms folded across the black-spotted leopard skin over his chest. Beside him, dangling the hideous heads, was the ape-like *manang-mansau*. Back on their *kliaus*, in motionless and solid rows, the head-hunters squatted, unblinking, upon their hams.

I closed my eyes on the glare. I could not breathe for the superheat. And oh, how that bandanna on my head seemed to retain the heat and so intensify it that I longed to scratch each separate itching hair!

I opened my eyes at a new and strange sound. It was the incanting of the weirdest chant I ever had heard. That chant was a perfect torrent of words going to a single high note. And it was all about the Green, Green God, a Golden Woman, and the Sacred Field of Stones!

I opened my eyes quite hastily, I assure you. And I saw all those Dyaks, led by the witch-doctor and chief, bowing upon their shields. Now they raised their long, dirty and tattooed arms, palms up, to the blazing bamboo tops; now they went flat on their *kliaus*, their arms out before them, palms flattened in the grass, and their heads upon their arms; and all the while, they chanted to that one treble note:

"O Voice of God! Thou who art green as uncured heads, thou who dost fly about, and call, and peck out men's hearts through their backs—O Green, Green God, hear us! Harken to the *Orang Benua* that worship and dread thee! Listen to our prayer!

"Take away this scourge of a Golden Woman who doth walk among us. Spirit her across the wide *sungei* (river), and into the sacred Jallan Batoe. For of her, O *Deewa* of the Voice and Greenness, we are greatly afraid.

"She has laid a curse upon our long-house; a full day's journey we have fled from that long-house; and still doth she pursue. For she is not like our women, O Green, Green God. She is taller and stronger and more beautiful. Aye, she is taller and stronger than even *Dau-Dau-Niakai* (Eater of Brains), who is *tuai rumah* of the Leoang *Benua* under thy hand, and more beautiful far is she than even the great butterflies which dart about in the night.

"Take her away, O *Kas*, *Kas Deewa*, back to the sacred Jallan Batoe and the glowing *Dobo*; and three heads shall be cured, this

night, and consecrated unto thee. Three heads, *Deewa*—two of *Orang Mohong* (White Men) and one that of thy first enemy and the first enemy of Genghis Khan. It is the yellow head of one that comes from the *negorei* (country) where the golden rhubarb grows; the head of a Chinese, O *Deewa*, with a long glossy tail by which to hang it up to thy glory.

"O Voice of *Deewa*! Thou who did bring the hordes of the great Genghis across the vast *laut* (sea), thou who did give them the long-tailed beasts of whose milk and blood they drank—O Green, Green God, heed our prayer!"

And so on, like an endless rogation, went that shrill chant.

All those head-hunters were salaaming toward the slow-going Loeang in the northeasterly direction I had been told lay the Jallan Batoe. They were praying, in the form of that terrible rogation, toward the emerald parrot in that Field of Stones. Some blight in the shape of one of the Golden Women was on them, it appeared, and they were filled with a great fear.

Yet Hyde had impressed upon me the fact that none of the Poonan ever wandered outside the Jallan Batoe. To them, it was almost a religious duty to keep aloof from all outlanders. Never did they suffer any outlander to enter their territory, nor Poonan man nor Poonan woman to enter the territory of any outlander.



I DID not understand. But I was given no time to understand. For now, as abruptly as it had commenced, the chant ceased.

The bamboo stalks had shot down, by then, into trailing lines of coals. Behind, bowed and unbreathing, their foreheads resting upon their long, dirty and tattooed arms, palm-flattened in the grass, were the Dyaks, perfectly motionless. An immense silence brooded over the gnat-infested theater.

Presently it was broken. The ape-like witch-doctor broke that silence. Of a sudden he raised his flower-bedecked head, flung his hands, palms up, to the swelled ball of moon, and chanted in that same high note:

"A sign! Give us a *tambatong*, O God of Greenness, a charm by which we may drive away this scourge of a Golden Woman. Only let us hear thy Voice!"

The eerie cry of that ape-like witch-doctor wailed away on the air like the cry of some wanderer, lost and dying in the pathless *rhuk*. Then, in the *cogon*-overgrown theater, all again was still as solemnity.

Directly above me, a bough, outreaching from the palisading jungle, snapped up from dragging with the heat of the fire. It snapped up with a distinct sound and a straightening movement that I could see. A flutter of high cool air had sighed upon it. And on that air-flutter, as in answer, came the words:

"Saw the rubies and the diamonds—in the Jallan Batoe. And the God, the Green, Green God! And then some, bee-lieve me—*cluck, cluck!*"

I sweated in a turmoil of overwrought feelings. Imagine it! Here was I in a festering glade in the very entrails of primeval jungle. On one side snailed, like a broad sluice of mud, the River Loeang; on the other, back from the lightning streaks of red-glowing bamboo stalks, were the abysmal head-hunters of Borneo, bowed row on row and absolutely motionless; and all about hedged the dripping green of everlasting jungle.

And yet my eyes saw not this scene. In my head was another picture. Again I saw a huge monolith of a man standing, sweating naked to the waist, before the colossal gilt-mantled statue of Kamehameha the Great.

"God!" I said to myself. "Six years up there, hidden from the sun! He's gone crazy."

The dirty red of the blood-creeper about the head of the witch-doctor lifted up from the grass. The raw diamonds about his neck flashed in the moon- and firelight. The witch-doctor had flung himself up and back upon his hams.

"*Deewa is baik!*" he shouted. There was in his voice a note as of joy supernal. "God is good! It is the Voice of *Deewa*, and the Voice of *Deewa* has given us a *tambalong*, a charm, by which we may drive away this scourge of a Golden Woman. *Cluck, cluck!*"

He made then what would have been, under any other circumstances, a laughable imitation of the indescribable clucking of William Hyde. That clucking, I realized, was all he had understood of the English rigmorole of the shell-and-pea man.

The lynx-eyed chief sat back; the bestial

head-hunters all sat back on their dirty bronze hams; and, for a time, I heard naught but rare imitations of that noise of tongue striking palate which had been a feature so characteristic of William Hyde.

At last, from where it was hidden beneath that sacred *pehang* skin over his chest, the chief produced a war-conch. It was formed from the voluted horn of some jungle animal. Upon it he blew one mighty blare.

The jungle night rang with the echoes of that blare, and then rang and rang again, with the echoes of beating tomtoms and clashing cymbals, and the shrieks and calls of bamboo flutes and *cogon* whistles. The head-hunters were afoot and, in this manner, were giving vent to their joy.

I saw the five men who had danced about the blazing bamboo clump and whom I now recognized as fire-tenders—I saw those five men run forward again and, with the ends of their long *sumplians*, scrape together in a heap the red coals of the fire. Then, stinging my nostrils as those loud sounds were stinging the drums of my ears, came the smell of human flesh, toasting and burning. The ape-like witch-doctor was curing those three heads over the red coals and smoke of the fire.

So near at hand it was, that din was terrifically loud. Well now, from the deeps of the jungle and louder than all that din, came a cry. "*Hee-ah! Hee-ah!*" it came, and it was like the echoing laughter of some monstrous ape.

There was something about that cry which seemed familiar to me. All in a trice, I remembered then where I had heard it. I knew it for what it was. It was the war-cry of the Poonan, which slips in echoes through interminable distances of windless air and of which Hyde had told me when his story had had to do with his escape from the Field of Stones!

"The Golden Woman! The Golden Woman!" the head-hunters shouted, and leaped toward the jungle.

"*Komile! Lengeau!*" yelled the chief. He flayed the backs of his fleeing men with the flat of his *mandau* as with a whiplash. "Go! Fly! It is the Golden Woman!"

In a headlong flight of mad fear, the dirty brown little savages made into the jungle. The ape-like witch-doctor dropped those three heads plump into the coals and, his wreath falling over one ear, followed. The last to leave the theater was the chief, his

eyes shifting wildly, under barren brows, like those of a distracted animal.

Now, save where, in the center, a heap of coals glowed redly, the little theater lay yellow and quiet under the moon. The mosquitoes and the flies and other unspeakable bugs settled down, in black patches, upon the trampled *cogon*. Nothing stirred.

I got afoot to make good my getaway. Well, with the act, out of the darkness of jungle there came forth, like some rare and entrancing night-moth, a woman.

CHAPTER VI

I GIVE EAR

SHE was the dreaded Golden Woman. Her eyes were brown and siliquiform, her hair a blue-black flow, and her skin like some smooth olive alabaster that had been sprinkled over with the dust of gold. She was dressed in a gown made of the feathers of golden and silver pheasants which, while it attempted to conceal, only seemed to accentuate, in the moonlight, the soft lines of her form. And she wore no ornaments, save tiny sequins of gold in the sensitive nostrils of her classic nose, and bangles of gold which jingled on her ankles as she came forward.

What had brought her out of the Jallan Batoe, why she had wended her way into this particular out-of-the-way theater, were things I could not account for. Nor could I account for the fact that her mere appearance had so scared those head-hunting folk into the jungle. I only knew that she had not seen me and that she did not see me, as I stood, now, in the tall *cogon*.

She came, with lithely swaying hips, up to that heap of coals which glowed redly in the center of the theater. She looked down at the blackening shapes of those three human heads. And I saw one gleaming white line of small teeth close tightly over her thin upper lip, and I saw her nostrils quiver so that the sequins of gold glinted in the fire-glow. Then, as with a shudder, she turned away from that heap of coals and toward me, boldly out of the *cogon* I stepped.

I stepped out boldly because I was unafraid. I knew she was a Golden Woman from the sheen of her skin. Indeed, I had thought, for a trice, she was Hyde's wife. But Hyde had said that his wife had hair of

the color of raw gold, which was an inheritance, almost an atavistic peculiarity, of all direct descendants of the red-haired Genghis Khan. This woman had hair so black it seemed in the moonlight, of a blue tinge. Wherefore, to judge from that and to judge further from her classic nose, slant eyes and lithe movements, I thought, now, she must be *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, the High Priestess of the Poonan.

For she was not young. Nor, were she *Lip-Plak-Tengga* in truth, could she be young. Hyde's adventures in the Jallan Batoe had all occurred twelve years before we had met up with him in Kauai and heard his story in the fo'c's'le of the tramp *Fairhaven*; since then, six added years had shuttled by; and so, altogether, *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, if she it was, was on that day some eighteen years older than upon the day when, in the bloom of her youth, Hyde first had seen her. She was forty years of age, now, at the least.

And yet, as I stepped toward her, I noted that her face was wholly unwrinkled. It was a beautiful face. And there was something about that face—verily, that peculiar something which, I have remarked, characterized the face of my former bunkie, Fitzhamon. It was beauty of features ineffably ennobled by evidence of experience, of sorrow, and of that rare faculty of thinking for oneself.

"*Salamat, Lip-Plak-Tengga*," I greeted her in Malay and Dyak. "Peace be to you, Flower of the Silver Star."

She understood what is was I said, for according to Hyde, Malay and Dyak made up, with Tartar, the bastard language of the Poonan. Yet did her bosoms heave and her slant eyes flutter wide, as in great surprise at me.

Thus, for a delicious moment, she stood before me in that colorful feathery gown, the low curve of her bosoms heaving and her whole willowy form trembling in amaze, like a flame. Then, with an inarticulate little gasp, she turned, and with tumultuous hurry, fled from me, across the theater toward the river.

I stood dumfounded. I could not bring myself, right then, to follow. I gazed sheepishly after her, and then, not knowing what better to do, looked myself over from foot to torso, in an attempt to account for her sudden panic at my appearance.

Never have I been judged ugly or repulsive.

Now, in a flash, I saw that I was both ugly and repulsive. My boots, to begin with, were pulpy and misshapen from the damp of the jungle earth, and the sole of my right shoe was missing, together with that strip of shirting which had tied it thereto. My khaki trousers were splattered with green and black muck; my shirt, torn in front, was tightened haphazardly across my chest; my face was bearded and reddened in spots by the bites from the innumerable gnats; and to top it all, binding my head like the head of some pirate out of a picture, was that soiled and gaudily printed bandanna.

I jerked off the bandanna. I thought no longer of the gnats. I thought only to make amends for the startlingness of my appearance; to off-set that appearance, if I could, by smooth talk and quiet actions. For there was a need for me to seek, by these diplomatic means, the good offices of *Lip-Plak-Tengga*. From my very first view of her, it had been uppermost in my mind to know her, in order that I might win, through her good offices, into the Jallan Batoe.

She had reached the margin of the river by now. She was thrusting aside, with feverish haste, the dragging stems of grass. It was as if she were searching for something there on that margin, uncovering something beneath those dragging stems.

I started toward her, bandanna in hand. On the sudden, as I did, out from the dragging stems of grass she shoved a *gobang* or small Dyak canoe. She leaped with admirable grace into it, lifted a short paddle from the thwarts and fell to wielding that paddle in quick sharp strokes over either side of the *gobang*. She was heading for the opposite bank.



I BROKE into a run. My shoes thumped under me like heavy woolen cloths. I ran on. I reached the edge of the river. I hesitated. Not that I doubted my ability to swim that breadth of river. Rather, I was afraid of crocodiles and oozy water-snakes.

All of a twitter with excitement, I ran up and down the river's edge, waving at the woman, shouting numerous pleas to her, meaningless pleas, for in my excitement and impotency, I know now I shouted in English.

She never turned round. Her splendidly molded arms lifted and dipped that paddle, now on one side of the *gobang*, now on the

other. The *gobang* slipped through the moonlight toward the opposite shore, leaving an ever lengthening fret of ripples in that river of oil.

I was down, my chin digging into the dirt. Quite suddenly, near one side of the theater, I had tripped and fallen over an uprooted trunk of tree. As ruefully I picked myself up, I saw, in that uprooted tree-trunk, a means of navigating that river with a minimum of danger from the snakes and crocodiles.

A deal of effort, and I launched the tree-trunk into the river. It was heavy with damp rottenness. There, in a slough of slack water and mire immediately beneath the dragging stems of grass, it sunk. I stood and cursed it roundly.

I was just in time, looking up, to see the *gobang* disappear with the High Priestess beneath the shadowy creepers and running hoops of mangroves that bordered the opposite jungled shore. I was afflicted, thereat, with a woful feeling of helplessness. My chance to win into the Jallan Batoe had passed from me.

But I had reached bed-rock in feeling helpless. My spirits could plumb no lower; in the nature of things, they must rise. Something must be done. And that little tragedy of the rotten tree-trunk showed me, all at once, the very thing to do.

The following hour found me busy for every minute of it. I rounded the borders of that jungle which palisaded the little theater. I broke off boughs from the trees. All were coated with a damp mold of moss and liverworts. I hefted each to determine if the core was sound. Near the river's edge I gathered together a goodly pile.

The moon had gone out, by that time, in the black void above. I worked by aid of the dying glow from the bamboo coals. I sorted the pile. Some of the boughs were ten feet long, other no more than six, but all were at least three inches in diameter. I shaved off, with my clasp-knife, all leaves and branches. Then, like another, if younger, Robinson Crusoe, I bound them together with withes of creepers into a rude raft.

Taking off shoes and socks, wading out through the margin of slough, I launched the raft in deep water and found that, as if by a miracle, it would float. Then with an extra long, carefully shaven bough in hand, to be used either as a sweep or a pole as the river-depth permitted, I clambered aboard

the crude craft and set to ferrying across the broad, slow-going river.

Now, save near its middle, that river was no deeper in any spot than seven or eight feet. I could use that bough, therefore, to pole my raft across. And as I used that bough, I felt it catch and pull on bunches of fresh-water growths which barnacled the bed.

That river was like some river of the Cambrian period. I disturbed from the growths countless infusoria and slippery water-snakes; the uneven prow of the raft broke continually through a scum of tiny globules that were the eggs of disease-breeding gnats; and once, where the growths put out blackish tendrils above the surface, I awoke from beneath those blackish tendrils, a ten-foot-long crocodile. He was brown, of scaly back, fishy of eye, and long, slimy and dripping of snout. He dived with a huge snap of his cruel jaws, just missing the stern of the raft.

I swished through the dependent creepers and running hoops of mangroves that protruded from the other shore of the river. The blackness was lifting, meantime, and the jungle was beginning to bestir itself after the lethargy of the night. A mesh of mist hung grayly over all like some starry nebula.

A trembling shook through the raft, as it stuck in the slough along the shore. I waded to the shore. I drew on socks and pulpy shoes. And then I was guilty of a peculiar thing.

I had rid my head of that piratical bandanna. Well here, on the shore of that Cambrian river, I knelt down, bathed my face, ran my fingers through my unkempt hair, and generally tidied my person. I hoped to overtake *Lip-Plak-Tengga* and should I overtake her, I did not desire, for the second time, to scare her away. Indeed was I quite beside myself to make a "hit," so to speak, with her and thus gain her aid in my try for the Jallan Batoe.

I had remarked her *gobang* beneath the growths, as I debarked. My toilet made, I struck out straight from that *gobang* and off northeastward up a faint runway through the jungle. And I did not miss much the lack of the sole from my right shoe. I found that on this side the river the jungle was free from all impedimenta of the head-hunters—free from concealed spring-bows, from thorns festering in the

grass, and from pits barbed with poison-tipped stakes.

The way was a continual ascent now. I was making up a series of uplands which rose from the Loeang, one on the back of the other. The jungle was, also, more open hereabouts. There were long arcades of trees, spaced apart like the natural columns of a pine forest; and occasional little meadows, there were, and hillside savannas where the new-risen sun dappled in slanting streaks the rich decaying leaf-mold on the ground.

The jungle seemed very quiet, that dawning. There was not even the cheep of sun-birds or the scattering patter of bushrats. I went companioned by my thoughts and naught beside. And thus I was going on through the jungle and the bright young day when, all at once, I was shaken out of my thoughts and profoundly moved on hearing, close at hand, some one speaking in English.

I had been pursuing a long arcade of trees, leaf-carpeted and dappled by sun. The voice came from somewhere to the right, from somewhere beyond the line of trees which lay in that direction. Speaking as it did in English, the voice must be, I thought right off, the voice of Fitz, of De Jong, or the negro, Harry Christmas or perhaps even William Hyde. Who else could it be in this primordial and preposterous jungle, deep in the dark of Borneo?

I halted and gave ear. The tones of the voice had dropped away. And now, as I gave ear, the quietude of the dawning, the profundity of that jungle, was borne in upon me. I heard naught—not the snapping of a twig, not the rustle of a leaf, not the flutter of a feather of wind.

But I continued to give ear. And then again, from beyond the line of trees to the right, the voice spoke coaxingly:

"Ooh, why will you so naughtily be, *amo-anggat*? Why will you come not to me? I will keess you and pet you; right home, I will carry you. And I will feed you *rawa-rawa* plums and—ooh, a joint of sugar cane! Come to me, *amo-anggat*. Come to *Kopo-Kopo-Sabayan*. I shall not you harm. Only *Lip-Plak-Tengga* would harm you. Do not stay up there, away from me. Come down, come down, *amo-anggat*—ooh, pleasee!"

The voice spoke lispingly, with a queer stress on certain words, a rushing together of other words, and an odd rising and falling

modulation that formed, altogether, an accent as foreign and different as it was delicious. It was like the voice of one who was airing, thus, a knowledge of a strange tongue—English. Certainly not the voice of Fitz, of De Jong, or even of the boss-boy, Harry Christmas.

It was the voice of a girl, dulcet, soft as Doric reeds, piquantly lisping, and almost laughably precise and stilted. It was the voice of a girl who called herself *Kopo-Kopo-Sabayan* which means in Dyak, Butterfly of Hades, that is, Butterfly of the Dark.

Whom she was pleading with to draw near her, I had little guess. I only knew she addressed him in that term of endearment applied to Dyak boys—*amo-anggal*, meaning little boy. Wherefore, to find out for a verity and as well, to look upon her, I approached the line of trees from beyond which the voice seemed to come.

I passed beneath the arch of two trees. With my hands I parted a drapery of flaming lorthanthus which dripped from that natural archway. And thereupon, looking through I beheld a most singular and charming sight, surely the last one in all the world one would expect to see in Borneo and in this before-Adam jungle.

CHAPTER VII

BUTTERFLY OF THE DARK

IN A little opening in the jungle, a greeny glade, a tiny meadow entirely surrounded by flowering thornapple bushes and hanging creepers and trees, a very young girl stood, looking upward, the sunlight falling on her fresh young face in a golden shaft and lighting up its girlish beauty. She was looking up toward the lofty top of a *durian* tree which stood to one side of the little meadow. Her lips moved and she spoke, though for the life of me I could not see the one she so charmingly wheedled with love words.

She was very young indeed. She was little more than seventeen. And so boyishly slim she was, so boyishly dressed, she looked rather small and frail as she stood there among all those tall trees. Her face, upturned to the sun, was round and prettily made; the lips like the lips of a baby, bow-shaped, parted as for excited breaths, never meant to be closed; the nose short and ingenuously retroussé; and her eyes long and

of that green hue of grass in the moonlight, of deep water under the sun.

She had an adorable little forehead. Her hair, richly and darkly red, was bound up plainly beneath a small cap of woven cane that set rakishly upon her head. From beneath the red strands of hair, two tiny ears appeared like sprigs of white, and about the adorable forehead, pendent on golden threads from the edge of the cap, dangled and trembled, in the sunlight, a number of gold odd-shaped ornaments or devil-chasers.

She was dressed not as the Dyak women dress, in *kain* or petticoat drawn tightly about the waist, in *gronong* or corset of decorated hoops of rattan, and in brass and bead ornaments from ankle to hair. She was dressed in a boyish costume as wholesomely severe as that which characterizes the Chinese woman. Withal, it was as colorful, too.

She wore a blouse of silk, purple as the flowers of the surrounding thorn-apple bushes, and loose little pantaloons of leek-green that reached down to naked, white and slim ankles. Her feet were encased in woven-grass sandals, from between the fiber thongs of which her toes twinkled, creamy white and transparent.

She carried in one hand a single-stringed fiddle, the body of which was half a coconut shell, the arm a piece of cut *bilian* wood, and the lone string a strip of thin rattan. The bow was of bent cane and taut rattan. And now, as I looked, she raised the instrument and with it menaced the unseen one, and stamped her pretty foot as though vexed, and said:

"Ooh, why will you not obey me, why will you not obey me, *amo-anggal*? I talk to you in this strange lanquis which my father taught me and which you know so well, and you pay me back no heed, no. Do you know me? I am *Kopo-Kopo-Sabayan*, leetle Butterfly of the Dark, who feeds you *rawa-rawa* plums and sugar cane, and who loves you. Pleease come down to me, *amo-anggal*. Pleease, pleease come back with me into the Jallan Batoe."

Forsooth was this a fortunate day. Here in this greeny glade I had come, quite by chance, upon an uncommonly strange and young girl, and she had opened her sweet baby lips to coax some unseen truant, and in a jiffy, as it were, she had made mention of the Jallan Batoe, the beautiful and sought-for place.

And now, to cap it all, came more news of the Jallan Batoc. From the lofty top of the *durian* tree at her mention of the Jallan Batoc as at a signal, rolled out a voice. It was the voice of William Hyde, the lost shell-and-pea man. For the words that dropped down to me then, from the lofty top of that *durian* tree, were the very words of that never-to-be-forgotten rigmarole of William Hyde:

"Went Jallan Batoc. Went round and round and up the Barito to the Jallan Batoc. And then some, then some, bee-lieve me! Saw the red, red rubies in the Robe of Holies. In the Jallan Batoc. Saw the rubies and the diamonds and the pearls and the emeralds in the Jallan Batoc. And the God, the Green, Green God! And then some, bee-lieve me—*cluck, cluck!*"

Now, to my great surprise, I made out in the *durian* tree, perched aloft like some huge and greeny fruit, clinging two toes before and two behind to one of the topmost branches, a square-tailed, red-eyed parrot—the parrot, Mogul.

I was sure, right off, it was Mogul. After six years I was sure it was Mogul. I was absolute in my certitude. Who else than this bird alone, that had been Hyde's familiar and buddie and thus had learned to clatter out the rigmarole Hyde himself forever had repeated—who else could have waked the Borneo jungle with those old singsongy words?

The thing was plain now. Mogul's voice it was that the head-hunters in the natural theater had heard and, hearing, had thought the Voice of the Green, Green God. And Fitz and De Jong and I, too, had been fooled by his voice.

Mogul's voice it was we had heard down on the Barito and believed the voice of William Hyde. Mogul, therefore, and Mogul alone, had sent us scurrying for the Jallan Batoc.

Filled now with this discovery and to make my assurance doubly sure, I stepped out through the draping loranthus.

"*Amo-endun*," I began, "little girl——"

She turned about at sound of my voice.

"Ooh!" she exclaimed, and she looked full at me and her eyes grew wide and round, half in a child's wonder, half in an extremity of surprise.

"Little girl," I went on rapidly, "do not be afraid. I shall bring down Mogul for you. It is Mogul, isn't it?"

But she was tongue-tied. All she could do was to nod dumbly.

I started for the *durian* tree. As I did, I flung back over my shoulder:

"Only Mogul could say those words. The rigmarole, you know. William Hyde's rigmarole."

That was a sort of test statement. Well, she answered it. She answered it with a surprising manner and a great burst of English. She smiled naively and then, with a child's frankness and impetuosity, she said:

"Ooh, yes. My fathaire taught him that. My fathaire, who went to a great school across the water, taught me to spik the Eenglish like you do, and Mogul. My fathaire is quite wonderful, what you say. He made this *serunai*, too." And she held up for my inspection the one-stringed fiddle.

I halted and turned back, suddenly grave.

"*Amo-endun*," I said, "little girl, your father must be William Hyde."

I had it all figured out by then. It was now eighteen years since William Hyde first had entered the Jallan Batoc and wooed and won, as his bride, the Marshal Queen of the Poonan, Golden Feather of Flame. The dates and inferences concatenated. This girl was little more than seventeen. Her father spoke English, he had gone to some great school, as she expressed it—no doubt Cambridge where Hyde once had told me he had been educated to be a barrister. She must be, therefore, the daughter of William Hyde, the only white man I knew who ever entered and lived in the Sacred Field of Stones.

Of course, I pursued the thought, William Hyde had known nothing of her when he had been dragged by the Monster Man out of the Jallan Batoc. At the time in the fo'c's'le of the tramp *Fairhaven* six years before, when he had related to Fitz and I his story, he had not known even if his wife still lived. And he had known naught of his daughter until he had come back, into the Jallan Batoc some years before, to behold her, no longer a baby but a girl nearly grown.

Now, just as I had been pondering in my head, quite so had the girl been pondering. Her little forehead was knuckled, wholly adorably, with a great perplexity. With a singular gravity, she said:

"No, my fathaire is not called William Hyde. I never heard of this William Hyde. But I must explain. With us Poonan, it is

the—how do I say it?—ooh, yes; it is the fashion to name parents after their children. My fathaire, you must know, is supposed to be the fathaire of old Mogul, up in that tree. My fathaire is called *Apai-Burong-Raya-Kas-Kas-Deewa*, Fathaire of the Bird that is Like the Green, Green God.”

“Your father is,” I insisted, “a tall man, with hair red as blood—”

“Ooh, no, no,” she denied, shaking her head so vehemently that the golden devil-chasers sparkled and flashed, on her forehead, in a tremulous dance. “My fathaire is no tall man at all. He is smaller than I, much smaller than I. His head comes no higher than my shoulder.”

“But his hair is red,” I persisted. “He has a beard that circles his face like a dog-collar, and it is as red as blood.”

“His hair is as white,” she said, “as was *Mohong Wook’s*, the old *Adjie*, who died when I was a child.”

“I have heard of him, *Mohong Wook*,” I remarked for lack of anything better to say.

Indeed and sorely was I puzzled. I felt I was on the wrong track; the child seemed never to agree with me; we could get nowhere thus. I looked down at her fresh, young, upturned face. And a sudden, strange thought appulsed on my brain—a thought vague yet somehow horrible. And I asked:

“Does your father walk upon his legs?”

There in all that sunshine, a shadow seemed to fall athwart her round childish face; her long greenish eyes saddened; and I would, then, that I could have recalled my question.

But she was very brave.

“My fathaire walks not upon his legs, but upon his two hands,” she said. “His legs drag behind him.”

Dear Lord! The trees, the hanging creepers, the flowering bushes—that whole sunshiny glade seemed to leap and reel, as she spoke, before my eyes. My stomach revolted at the dreadful news. I felt squeamish, sick—aye, sick to vomiting.

Before my mind’s eye uprose William Hyde. But not as I last had seen him—huge, splendid, monolithic, a magnificent figure of a man. Before my mind’s eye uprose William Hyde in the straits he had fallen to in this late day—his hair prematurely whitened from torture, his body from the waist up beautiful, broadening with simplicity and strength like some

Doric column into a massive breadth of shoulders, yet all beneath the waist, all beneath the trunk—decay, destruction and repulsiveness! His legs no longer firm stark pillars of tendon and muscle with the play of great energies through thigh and calf, but flabby things that could no longer uphold him; ruined decadent things that, as he walked upon his hands, dragged behind him like the broken legs of a fly.

“They’ve hocked him behind the knees!” I said, somberly enough. “He’s been hamstringed by the Poonan. The butchers!”

I grasped the girl by the wrist.

“Tell me why they did this,” I said.

“Your hand hurts,” she pleaded.

I removed my hand from her arm.

“I can trust you,” she said, partly in interrogation, more to reassure herself. “You spik the English like my fathaire; you are no Poonan; and you say you knew my fathaire—”

“I was his friend,” I interrupted. “I knew him once in Hawaii and once, too, I offered to go with him into the Jallan Batoc. Please tell me all. You can trust me,” I ended, “implicitly.”

For a little she was very still. I stood facing her and waiting. The sunlight, dancing through the lofty trees, sprinkled over here and there trembling sequins of gold—upon her rakish cap and purple blouse and green pantaloons, upon the grass at our feet and the creepers about that never stirred. Everything seemed very still and Sunday-like.

At last, with grave calmness, she said in her oddly accented voice:

“When I was a leetle thing and played with wooden dolls and with the jewels on the *klians* in the Stone *Dobo*, I used to love to listen to stories about *Girgasi*, the *Adjie* of the Evil Ones, and about Genghis Khan, my forefather, and about *Kumang*, too, the Dyak Goddess of Beauty and wife of the hero, *Klieng*, and *Endun-Saransu-Galing-gam-Tinchin-Mas*, the girl *Saransu* painted like a gold ring. My mothaire used to tell me these stories after her days in the banana walks. My mothaire was Golden Feather of Flame, once the *Toewan Orlok Radenajo*, the Great Marshal Queen of the Poonan, but then a slave.

“Now, one story there was, above all others, that I loved most to hear. It was the story of my fathaire, the *Toewan Orlok Raj*. Never did my mothaire tire of telling

me of him. Her face, brown from the sun, drawn with toil, would grow, ooh so bright and young, as she told how he broke the *Mandau* of Genghis Khan, and took her in his arms there in the Stone *Dobo*, and made her his bride with a keess.

"Never once, in all the times she told the story, did my mothaire fail to end with the same longing and hope. 'It is all I live for,' she would say wearily. 'Some day, somehow, I know, your fathaire will return. Then I will show you to him. And then I will die, gladly.'

"Still can I remember the day when, after long years of waiting, my fathaire did return, just as my mothaire had said he would. What a day that was! How the bamboo flutes shrilled and the conches blared, as the Poonan hurriedly donned padded skins and *kliaus*, and crowded, to the beat of tomtoms, into the mouth of that tunnel which is the way into the Jallan Batoe.

"At that time, as I have said, my mothaire was of the slaves that labored in the *pisang* walks. We lived not in the animal stones of the freemen, but in a grass hut in the *campong* for field-laborers, which was close up to the *Danau* or Swamp. In our grass hut that day my mothaire and I waited together, clinging to each other, and fearing for the life of him who had returned. Only too well we knew that should he dare come on into the Jallan Batoe, the Poonan would have his life.

"But ever louder blew in our ears the noises of the war-conches and the *cogon* whistles and the bamboo flutes. They who had gone to meet my fathaire at the tunnel mouth, were returning down the Avenue of Palms toward the Stone *Dobo*, which was not so far away from our humble door.

"We came out of our hut, then, and watched them stream by. In the thick of the crowd of men and women we thought to see him walk a prisoner, who once had stood upon the Nine-Times-Nine Throne of the Tartar Khanate and lorded it over all the Poonan.

"Well, towering above the heads of the men, rising even above the heads of the taller women, that were as many as there are butterflies in the poppy fields when the opium is ripe, I saw, surely enough, the splendid head and great shoulders of the man who was my fathaire. Red-haired he was, then, and red of beard, even to the color

of blood. He looked brave. And he *was* brave. Among those Poonan, he walked as though he were their king.

"And wonderful to see! The Poonan made way for him. They kow-towed to him. It was not as if he were the man they so hated. It was as if he were indeed their king, in all truth their returned master.

"Now, upon my fathaire's left shoulder, perched a bird such as never in all my life had I seen before. Like the Green, Green God it was. But the Green, Green God is no living *burong*, only a dead block of stone. This bird was alive. It cocked its head, it smoothed its feathers that were green as the jungle, it blinked its red eyes. It frightened me.

"My mothaire shivered at sight of that *burong*—shivered like a *plandok*, a mouse-deer, when the earth trembles and rocks beneath its feet.

"But if that first view of Mogul frightened my mothaire and me, it frightened also, a deal more, the Poonan. To a man, the Poonan were afraid of that strange green *burong* than which none ever had seen the living like.

"Because they were afraid of the bird, they were afraid, as well, of its owner, the huge white man. They kept looking sideways at Mogul, and muttering questions, and milling round; but ever keeping a goodly distance from my fathaire and his parrot, as though in fear lest the touch of either should strike them down dead."

Now that the girl had something to tell and was in the sweep of the telling, her words, while still rushed together at times and always oddly modulated, seemed to come less stiltedly, more easily. Her father, William Hyde, had been an able instructor truly, though well he might, I remembered, Cambridge "full-blue" as he once had been and educated, before the orchid fever got him, to be a barrister.

Her words were simple words, yet come of their vividness, they held me in a thrall. I had forgotten, wholly completely, the fact that Mogul himself, the old beach-comber, was still perched aloft, there in the tall *durian* tree. But abruptly, now, I was brought to an awareness of his presence.

At the girl's mention and repetition of his name, I heard, overhead, a monstrous fluttering of wings and a harsh cawing. Up into the air Mogul lifted himself, and then down of a sudden he feathered and, with a

most cock-sure mien, took up a perch upon the girl's shoulder.

Affectionately the girl stroked his pointed green wings and rested one cheek against him.

"Ooh, you bad *amo-anggal!*" she rallied him. "So you have made up your mind to be good, now that we are not paying you the leetlest heed."

"He's quite human in that," I generalized.

Mogul turned a cold and calculating red eye upon me. Then his flesh-colored lids ran down over his eyes like window shades, his head drooped, and he clung there to her shoulder, two toes before and two behind, swaying a little, thinking thoughts.

The girl was digging into the pockets of her pantaloons.

"Your father," I reminded her, "approached the Stone *Dobo*, and you and your mother saw him, and you both saw, to boot, the fear in which the Poonan held him and his parrot."

She nodded brightly, though she still fidgeted with her pockets.

"My fathaire saw my mothaire," she went on quickly, her words, queerly accented, tumbling over one another. "She was standing alone, apart from the people, and I was almost hidden in the folds of her grass skirt; for I was then, six years ago, rather leetle."

"My fathaire did not see me, but he did see my mothaire. His head came up, his blue eyes lighted. My mothaire he knew. For all that she wore the coarse grass skirt of the slave, for all that she was no longer creamy white of skin, but tanned by the sun and haggard from toil, my mothaire he knew."

"Up he went to her, and he put his great arms about her, and he keessed her. Yes, there before all those people, as though still she were his young and beautiful bride, he keessed her. It was for this meeting, all these years, my mothaire had lived and waited."

CHAPTER VIII

THE PARROT PLAYS A PART

THOSE were quite the most extraordinary little pantaloons in all the world, those little pantaloons of leek-green on Butterfly of the Dark. They had pockets in them, just like any boy's.

And like a boy herself, the girl paused now in the story of William Hyde's Return, and placed the one-stringed fiddle on a mound of grass at her feet, and gave over a whole-souled attention to searching those pockets. She put one hand, and then the other, into the pockets. She looked suddenly startled. She bit her curved little lower lip in vexation.

"Ooh," she asked, looking up, a depth of pathetic appeal in her eyes. "Have I lost it?"

"What?" I began, but at that moment her face lighted up and after a tremendous business of digging about in one pocket, she brought out a long string of plaited grass-fibers, thin as twine and strong.

The parrot Mogul, making no resistance more than a quick opening of his red eyes, she proceeded then to bind securely one end of this leash to his left foot. The other end she tied about her own wrist. And the parrot thus made captive, she seated herself on the mound of grass, her pantalooned legs crossed under her, tailor-fashion, her whole aspect one of complacent calm.

I felt awkward standing there above her. With all her unspoiled girlishness, still she must have sensed it. She looked up at me, the golden devil-chasers on her forehead quivering in the sunlight like drops of dew. And she said—

"Won't you sit down?"

I did so. And thereupon as gravely and as naively as before, she went on with the telling of that which was now history.

"The Poonan," she said, "greatly feared my fathaire whom you call William Hyde. They feared him because he possessed this parrot and for that reason alone. They did not—what you call it?—ooh, yes; they did not honor him as they once had done on the occasion of his first appearance in the Jallan Batoe. They did not make him *Raj*. They only drew away from him, and left him alone with my mothaire and me, and watched and feared."

"But he was happy, my fathaire, though there was no one to do him honor. He was happy to live in the slaves' quarters and eat the food of slaves, if only he might be near my mothaire and me."

"Thus, very fast, two moons came and went. My fathaire had plans under way to regain his old position of Great Marshal King. He had won over the two *Adjies*, old *Mohong Wook* and *Tumbuk Ladda* or Long

Knife, whom my fathaire calls the Gunner. Soon he thought to sit upon the *Tojout-Plo-Sie* Throne of the Tartar Khanate with his wife, Golden Feather of Flame, at his side.

"Then came a night of rain. The time of downpours and earth-quiverings and great winds was on us. The stars were swept from the heavens. The rain fell in thick streams that bound earth to sky, that never stopped, that fell always with a heavy sound.

"Through the crater, a wind moaned; it whipped the palms as though they were withes of *cogon*, it bore strange sounds that told of stranger happenings. The earth beneath began to quiver, then to shake from side to side and backward and forward. "I could not stand up in the hut.

The moaning of the wind grew ooh, so loud. And now the earth would settle down into a long swaying motion, and now it would heave and shake violently for long spells. The rain came down without a break. And thus it went through many suns and darknesses.

"It was during the most dreadful stages of the storm that we missed Mogul from our grass hut. He had chased a *howeo*—I mean what you call a rat—beneath the door-flap and, once outside, had been beaten down and perhaps drowned by the rain; or else it was that he had been carried away like a stripped palm-leaf on the great wind, or had been buried in some crack which, when the earth shook, had opened in the ground and now spurted sand and gravel and water high into the air. At least these were the views of my fathaire.

"The light came and darkened three times, while it rained and rocked and roared, and still the parrot did not return. Then, somehow, *Lip-Plak-Tennga*, the High Priestess, became aware that the parrot was gone from our hut. And that proved a mountain of trouble—"Ooh," she broke off abruptly, "I just don't know how to tell you this!"

She looked away from me and colored furiously, almost to the poppy-red shade of her hair.

"Why, take your time," I encouraged, surprised. "Explain all. How did that knowledge prove a mountain of trouble?"

"Well," she began slowly, "*Lip-Plak-Tennga* who, years before, had dethroned my mothaire and made of her a lowly slave, was morally my guardian. She it was who

had seen to it that I remained secluded within our hut." The girl hesitated. "It is important, you must know, that my skin should be the fairest in all the Jallan Batoo, because I am to be, some day, on coming of an age, the—the——"

She came to a full stop. But I knew now why she had blushed. With an instinctive modesty, she had wanted to keep from me all knowledge of the magnificence of her station.

In quite a matter-of-fact manner, I said—

"You are to be, then, some day, the Marshal Queen of the Poonan?"

She nodded assent; then, as if in haste to refute that assent, she added:

"But really, at the time, *Lip-Plak-Tennga* never purposed that I should be *Orlok Radenajo*. She herself was fulfilling the office of queen and she meant, as long as she lived, to fulfil that office. She was, in truth, the Queen.

"But she feared my fathaire. She feared what he might do to depose her. Her hands were tied, what you say. Her vassals, the Poonan, feared my fathaire, too, she knew, because they supposed him to be the fathaire of the dread *burong* that was like the Green, Green God.

"Now, however, she realized that with the bird gone, the Poonan would lose all fear of my fathaire, its owner. The disappearance of the parrot might mean my fathaire's downfall and death. Certain it was that my fathaire, lacking that *burong* of dread, his instrument of power, would no longer be able to raise a hand against her. And thus would her throne be secured to her forever.

"It was the seventh interval of darkness. Out in the storm, forms moved. Most made toward the Stone *Dobo*. But one, bent low to the wet ground to avoid being hit by flying palm-leaves—that one stopped at our hut. There was a rap on the frame of the doorway. He was the Chieftain *Tumbuk Ladda*, whom my fathaire calls the Gunner.

"The Poonan were crowding into the Stone *Dobo*, he said. It was at the call of *Lip-Plak-Tennga*. She had given out that there was something they should know. He had rushed to my fathaire. He feared for my fathaire in the dark matter that was afoot.

"Lifting the door-flap, at that very

moment, an old white-haired man lurched from the rain outside into the hut. He was old *Mohong Wook*. He did not like this business one bit, he told my fathaire; but he had come, at the command of *Lip-Plak-Tengga* and the Poonan, now gathered in the stone *Dobo*, to bring my fathaire to that great temple. And would my fathaire come?

"My fathaire looked long at the bent soaked figure of the old man before him whom he had won for a friend. Some dark matter was indeed under way. He suspected that the disappearance of Mogul was at the bottom of it. He knew fear.

"But his eyes held a hard blue light. He would go. He buckled on, about his waist, a strange-looking something that flashed in the coco-oil light. He reached for his *labong*—what you say—his hat.

"My mothaire slipped to him and, with one hand on his arm, made as if to stop him. She was afraid. She was afraid of the black rain outside. But she was more afraid of what the Poonan might do, once they saw that Mogul in truth was gone and there was no longer any reason to fear my fathaire.

"My fathaire forced a smile. He patted her hand. And rather sadly yet with determination, he shook his head.

"*'I must go, Golden Feather of Flame,'* he said. *'I must face them. That is our one chance. To hide here would mean to show fear of them. That would bring them about our ears like a rush of rats.'*

"There was something hidden beneath my fathaire's words. My mothaire understood.

"*'Let them come, my Raj!'* she cried bravely. *'If die we must, let them come here so that we may all die together!'*

"*Mohong Wook* was an old man, dried of flesh and frame; but the heart that worked within him was far from dried. Now, at my mothaire's words, he sat himself down on the couch. And, as he looked at her who had been his queen, his old eyes overflowed and the tears streamed unheeded down the wrinkles of his cheeks.

"Altogether, there was that in the eyes of my fathaire, in the tearful old eyes of *Mohong Wook*, and in the words of my mothaire, which sent a great fear through me, though I was young and could not fully understand. I saw the Gunner walking back and forth, bounding back and forth like some hungry tiger-cat, his big hands opening and closing without pause.

I ran to my fathaire. I grasped his knees, and sobbed.

"He patted my head. As though a *mandau* had entered his heart, he exclaimed—

"*'Do not cry; ah, do not cry, leetle Butterfly of the Dark!'*

"He looked at my mothaire and he shook his head once, sorrowfully.

"*'I must go,'* he said. *'If only to keep them away from here, from you and from my leetle girl, I must go. And should aught befall me this night, live on for her, Golden Feather of Flame. She is the precious cup that holds our two lives.'*

"He was gone, then, between his two friends, the Gunner and old *Mohong Wook*, and we were left alone to huddle together and hearken to the storm outside, and to shiver and imagine horrible things in the dark.

"What befell my fathaire in the Stone *Dobo*, that night of the great storm, I leetle know. I only know that after what seemed a long time, there came from without the hut a moaning that was terrifying. My mothaire started up. I sat beside her on the couch, and I could feel her hand grow cold and hot by turns.

"*'What is that?'* she cried out; and I answered, *'It is the moaning of the wind.'*

"But that moaning came again and again. At times it rose into shrieks that were like the cries of tigers, and at other times, sunk so low it was like the gasps of a dying man, choking with pain.

"My mothaire rose up; she could stand it no longer; and she went to the door.

"She lifted up the flap. Amid all that roaring of the storm, I heard then, distinctly, an odd sound, like the sound of some one dragging a heavy weight over the ground. And then, in the low doorway, I saw my fathaire. . . God in Heaven!

"Ask me not to repeat what I saw then. My fathaire who had come back to us into the Jallan Batoo, whom we loved, who was all the world to us—no longer walking upon his two legs, but dragging himself upon his hands—his legs limp things beneath him, useless and dead—and upon his shoulder, beaten and rumped, Mogul the parrot—Ooh, what horror!"



NOW, as if she were once again in the grip of that hideous horror, the girl shivered all over as she spoke, and hid her eyes with her two hands. What to do, what to say, I did not know, though

deeply did I feel for her. I waited, mutely sympathetic.

After a moment a tremor shook through her and she took her hands from her eyes, and she locked them together about the roundness of one pantalooned knee. Then, from where she had broken off in her story, looking straight ahead the while, she went on:

"My mothaire clutched at the *pandanus*-woven flap. It seemed to me, then, that a terrible time crept by, as she stood, and stared and stared. Then she made a queer leetle sound in her throat; like this—" and the girl sought to imitate a spasmodic hiccup—"and she slid down to the floor, and she was very still.

"Everything seemed very still. I could see my fathaire's blue eyes darting this way and that, and they were like the darting eyes in a dead man's face.

"No longer sounded in my ears the noises of the storm. Ringing through my head, ringing again and again through my head, for all that she was now very still, I could hear that queer leetle *hiccup, hiccup* of my mothaire.

"I began to cry. Exactly why I do not know to this day; but there was something about all these dreadful happenings that was like the terrors of darkness to my child's mind; and as though my heart would break, I began to cry.

"The never-stopping moaning of my fathaire broke into a shout. He shouted some strange word which he never since has taught me the meaning of and which I now forget, but which at the time, I remember, sounded most frightful in my ears. And then with his legs dragging under him, he reached out and he clasped me to him. And in a broken voice, his great head buried against my shoulder, he sobbed—

"Ooh, why didn't they kill me, why didn't they kill me!"

The glade rang with the girl's words, with that repetition of the piteous appeal of her father. And she looked up at me, and her eyes—long greenish eyes in a milk-white face—glistened lustrously, as with the tears of terrible memories, the tears of a terrible pathos.

"That is all I know," she concluded, her curved little upper lip quivering.

Quietly I got up and, as quietly, in a manner intended to instill comfort and banish dark regret, I placed one hand upon her

soft, rounded shoulder. Upon the other shoulder, Mogul slept.

"It is hard," I said. "You have seen things and suffered things it is not just that any mortal should suffer. Believe me, I feel deeply for you and yours and, should I sound now, to any degree unsympathetic, I beg your forgiveness. But it seems to me that there was a radiance amid all your father's sufferings. It seems to me that if there be any Providence, at least He gave to your father, in his sufferings, a tittle of consolation, a mote of recompense. In all your father's sufferings, there was one to help make those sufferings less awful, to share the burden of his Cross—your mother."

Sadly the girl shook her head.

"To my mothaire," she said, "the shock was too great. After all she had undergone since my fathaire had left the Jallan Batoe—she who had been Queen of the Poonan, but was now a slave—this shock, on top of all she had gone through, proved too great. She never recovered. She lingered for a while, it is true; but the piece of moon that sailed up through the sky, on the first night after the long storm, had not come to its full ere she sunk low and lower, and died."

"But tell me," I asked with what must have been a startling abruptness, my voice and wits sharpened by sudden thought. "What barbarity, what inhumanity, what degradation of ferocity, possessed the Poonan that they should thus have tortured your father? Why did they not kill him, even as he wished they had?"

She shook her red and rakishly-capped head.

"What happened in the Stone *Dobo* that night, I can only guess."

"But your father—"

"My fathaire never told me, save by a word, now and then. Yet have I pieced these chance words together into a kind of explanation. And so it is that I have come to think that, when the festival of torture was at its worst, when my fathaire had been—what did you call it?"

"Hamstrung."

"Yes; hamstrung by that half of the *mandau* of Genghis Khan he once had broken, and was awaiting in terrible pain the time when that half of *mandau* should be sunk in his body—at that moment, through one of the slits in the white walls of the Stone *Dobo*, there flew in, I think, and perched

upon my fathaire's shoulder, the parrot Mogul."

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "That was the propitious moment! To the Poonan then, Mogul must have appeared like some omen of divine retribution."

"I think yes," she said, nodding slowly as though a bit puzzled about the sense of my words. "I know I heard, from some of the Poonan afterward, that Mogul had dropped down from the sky, just to save my fathaire, at the order of the *Toewan Deewa*, the Great God."

"Then Mogul's appearance did save your father?"

"Ooh, yes! The Poonan no longer tortured him. My fathaire cried out that they end his pain by killing him; but they feared, then, to kill my fathaire. They kow-towed to him. Almost it was that they wished, such was their fear, that they could have undone that which already they had done."

"And that is why my fathaire was allowed to live," she ended. "Because of that fear of Mogul which the Poonan never since have been able to conquer, they have suffered my fathaire to live on in the Jallan Batoc—the mere shell of a man."

CHAPTER IX

LIP-PLAK-TENGGA TEARS A LEAF FROM THE PAST

I SAT down once again, beside the girl, and took her hand.

"I think," I said quietly, "that your troubles are past. I came here with a party of men for the express purpose of rescuing your father from the Poonan. We heard the voice of Mogul three days ago down the Barito and, believing it the voice of your father, we thought he was crying aloud in the night for help, and we were for at once rescuing him."

"Dissensions and even open strife have arisen among our party," I pursued. "Some of us forgot the real object of our journey in an immoderate desire for the Green, Green God. But I know now that once they have seen you and learned that you are William Hyde's daughter, and have heard from your lips how cruelly William Hyde and you have fared at the hands of the Poonan—I know then they will forget all, everything else, in their desire to aid you."

My head came up with sudden thought.

"Perhaps," I said, "perhaps you *have* seen my comrades! A thin, tall, clever-looking fellow—that would be my bunkie, Fitz; a big, liver-colored, bow-legged negro—that would be Harry Christmas, the boss-boy; and an odd little man with a pointed black beard and with eyes, wrinkled and puckered like a——"

"Ooh, yes," she exclaimed, springing to her feet and with the resilience of youth, casting aside her unhappy memories in the vividness of the present. "I passed by their *camping* this dawning, early this dawning. It's up that way toward the Jallan Batoc." And she pointed ahead, with her unleashed hand, in the direction I had been pursuing.

"I heard voices some way off—everything was so still," she went on; "so I took pains that they should not see me. I had just come out of the Jallan Batoc and ooh! I did not want any one to see me. It would mean a great loss to me, the defeat of all of my fathaire's hopes that I should someday be Queen of the Poonan, were I to be seen outside the Jallan Batoc. For, you should know, we are never supposed to leave the Jallan Batoc."

Now there was that in the girl's statement of this strict law of the Poonan—that no one should leave the Jallan Batoc—which caused me to pass over the fortunate fact that she had seen the rest of my party, in the urgency of a new and more important thought.

"Tell me," I asked quickly; "how is it that you happen to be outside the Field of Stones?"

"It all has to do," she answered, "with the second disappearance of Mogul—"

"Second disappearance? Did Mogul, then, disappear again?"

"Not a week gone, as my fathaire would say," she returned. "Mogul, you understand, being a *burong* of awe to the Poonan, has free play of the Jallan Batoc. No Poonan will harm him or touch him. True it is that they concern themselves in giving offerings of food to him; but as though he were the Green, Green God itself, no Poonan will touch him. And yet, not a week gone, Mogul disappeared."

"My fathaire could think of no reason for his disappearance. There was no storm like that which had held when he first disappeared. For my part, I made careful search in all the caves of the great animal

stones. Thus four suns passed. Mogul did not return. And he was nowhere to be found.

"I noticed, then, that *Lip-Plak-Tengga* also had disappeared, and no one knew whither. I asked questions. Some said that she might be keeping a lone watch, as High Priestess, in the grottoes beneath the immense cavern of the Stone *Dobo*, where dwells the Monster Man.

"I talked with the Priestesses. They said that were she below in those grottoes of the Stone *Dobo*, they would have placed aside for her, somewhere there, *lebets* of food. But they had not seen her in four days. Why, come to think of it, the last time they had seen her was on the very night that Mogul himself had disappeared.

"I came to a conclusion. *Lip-Plak-Tengga* was outside the Jallan Batoe. Where else? She must be outside the Jallan Batoe. And she had, in her possession, the parrot, Mogul.

"Only one thought remained to me then. It was an awful thought for me to think, who had been raised with all the customs of the Poonan banking me round like the walls of the crater. But I thought now to follow *Lip-Plak-Tengga* outside and recover the parrot.

"This dawning—the dawn of the fifth sun since the disappearance of Mogul—I came 'out.' I passed near the *campong* of *Orang Mohong*, those white men of your party, and I was greatly afraid; for never before had I seen men of the same color as my fathaire. Yet more afraid was I of that big, strangely dark man whom you call Harree Chreestmas; he was making loud sounds with his mouth. I sped on. And long afterward I still could hear, on the air, those loud sounds.

"And then, not so long ago, I saw Mogul here, perched upon the top of that tall *durian* tree. I was surprised. For nowhere near at hand could I see sign or sight of *Lip-Plak-Tengga*."

"You mistake," I interposed. "I met *Lip-Plak-Tengga* just a few hours before I chanced upon you."

As if weakened by a shock, the girl sat down with a kind of suddenness, and her long greenish eyes grew round with amazement.

"Ooh!" she breathed. "Is that really so?"

"Yes," I said, and I smiled. "But there is nothing so appalling in the knowledge. It

merely goes to show that you were wholly correct in your suppositions."

Quite filled with the reasons of the whole business and precisely to show her how correct she had been in her suppositions, I thought now to explain in natural sequence. I said:

"Yesterday, or rather last night, I came upon some *Orang Benua* across the river. They were making obeisance toward the Jallan Batoe; and offering sacrifice of human heads to the Green, Green God; and asking, in return, of the Green, Green God, deliverance from a certain Golden Woman who had been in their preserves for some days past, they said, and of whom they were vastly afraid. And the day before that, I had stumbled upon their long-house which, through fear of *Lip-Plak-Tengga* as I now believe, they had deserted in a panicky haste.

"That was two days ago. Well, three days ago, down on the Barito, my party and I heard the voice of Mogul and thought it the voice of William Hyde. At the time, Mogul could not have been so very far distant from us. Indeed, he had been very near us for some days; for the Dutchman, De Jong, said he had heard that voice on the two nights preceding. And so you see," I summed up, "that *Lip-Plak-Tengga* did bring Mogul out into the jungle and that they were out in the jungle for at least five days."

There was upon the girl's forehead, as I spoke, an adorable little knuckle, as if with rare energy she were concentrating her mind; and as I made each statement, connected clue with clue, and built up, against *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, a damning fabric of circumstantial evidence, she nodded slowly, thoughtfully. I felt, when I had finished, a deal like a detective hero of fiction. But when she said no word, and I had done, doubts and perplexities began to assail me.

"I do not understand," I said, "what reason *Lip-Plak-Tengga* can have to go to all this trouble. Why did she, in a manner of speaking, kidnap Mogul? Why did she bring him out into the jungle, so far into the jungles? Surely, she must have some good reason for this," I ended, "that she should dare to chance all her prestige with the Poonan, all her dignity of inherited caste, by coming out of the Jallan Batoe and living in the jungles for days and days."

The girl raised her head, and there was in

her vivid eyes a look of earnest seriousness. "Ah," she said, "you have stated just that which I believe. *Lip-Plak-Tengga* has, indeed, some good reason for all this. And I feel I know her reason. Let me explain.

"When my fathaire came into the Jallan Batoe with Mogul upon his shoulder, the Poonan knew fear of him, you remember, and knowing fear, they left him to live his life among them unharmed. But once the parrot disappeared, as it happened during that terrific storm, and they lost, instantly, all fear of my fathaire. They tortured him then, tortured him horribly. And they would have killed him, too, had not Mogul flown into the Stone Dobo.

"I fear me now that what happened once is about to happen again. Mogul has been lost in no storm; he has been kidnaped, as you say, by *Lip-Plak-Tengga*. The High Priestess took him out of the Jallan Batoe. She took him far from the Jallan Batoe, deep into the jungles, so that he should be unable to find his way back. That he has found his way back does not matter. What does matter is that she meant to rob my fathaire, thus, of the creature through which he inspires fear in the Poonan, of his *burong* of dread and power.

"She knows what she is about. The dis-

appearance of Mogul will be as the spark that fires dry *cogon* grass. The Poonan will rise up against my fathaire in an inflaming of all their slumbering hate. They will kill him this time! Ooh," she exclaimed fervently, her delicate lips trembling, "I do hope that *Lip-Plak-Tengga* has not yet returned into the Jallan Batoe!"

For the second time I got afoot. I got in a tumultuous hurry.

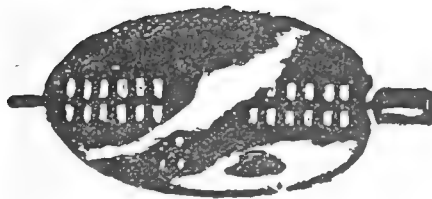
"She has returned!" I declared emphatically. "When I saw her last, she was hastening through this jungle toward the Jallan Batoe. The Jallan Batoe lies in that direction, does it not?" And I pointed ahead, up the way I had been pursuing.

She waited not to nod. She was by my side, clutching my hand, pulling me after her as she hurried precipitantly ahead, the single-stringed fiddle with its attached bow in one hand, the leashed parrot awake and clinging tightly, in a kind of fright, to her shoulder.

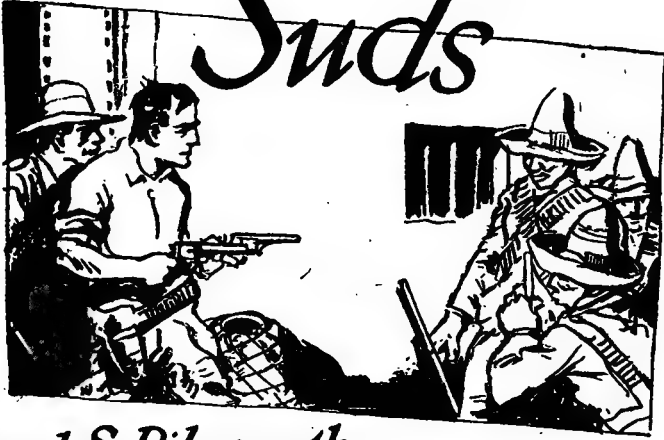
"Come, come," she breathed, her eyes on mine with pitiable entreaty. "For the love of that God about whom my fathaire taught me, let us hasten.

"*Lip-Plak-Tengga* is back in the Jallan Batoe. My fathaire's life is in peril. Only let us get Mogul back to him in time, and all may yet be well."

TO BE CONTINUED.



"Suds"



by

Edward S. Pilsworth

WHAT is it in a man that pushes him on to make good? Search me! A million different things, I reckon. Won't give up, grit, or often as not, ignorance of what you're bucking. This, I take it, is most common, as with Tommy Suddoth—"Suds" we called him. Why? Well, short for his name, I guess, and then, him being from the East, was always washing with soap every time he got a bit of dirt on him. Sort of a combination name, as it might be.

When Suds came down to us fresh from a college of mines, he was guyed quite a few, for you see a real practical miner hasn't much faith in book learning. Yet he seemed to know all about rocks and dirt and pay gravel, from the deluge down.

And cocky. Say! The boy was almost silly thataway. Not with us so much, but Injuns—just dirt. He'd seen some outlandish Potawatamis up north. And Greasers—well, he got his ideas from funny newspaper yarns and stories like Wolfville, I guess. Used to talk about a couple of United States regiments walking clean through the whole outfit.

Now to us guys as lived on the Arizona border, or had brought our skins and hair back from Mexico in a darned big hurry, and had seen the Diaz mob, and Maderistas, and Constitutionlists and Villa's crowd all fighting like bob-cats, with their merry jokes of *ley fuga* and *marihuana*, well

you can bet your other sock, such talk was loco, through and through.

Myself, I am a mine foreman, and Suds had been with us maybe three months, when Elliot, he's the superintendent, sent for me to his office.

"Bill!" he says, opening up the minute I showed in the doorway, "think you could run the mine for a few days, all by your lonesome?"

"I've done it before," I answered. "I'll tackle it!"

"All right."

And then he went on and gave me a lot of things to do, and told me about some shipments and so on. I was rising to leave.

"If I don't get back at all," he remarked quite casually, like it might be. "Have another, Bill? If I don't return at all, why send these papers up to Chicago by registered mail, and you will have to boss the mine till they send down a new man."

Believe me, I squatted back on my chair again some sudden.

"If you don't return?" I asked. "What's the joke?"

"Mighty little joke, Bill! A very serious business. Donna Isabel has been kidnaped."

Geel! Donna Isabel and her old dad were well known to every one of us boys, for the old man used to own about eight million square miles and a thousand gold mines down in Sonora; and when Mexico went

bad, he just got away with his daughter and his shirt. Both Elliot and Suds had been pretty attentive to the daughter, and I was hit a bit hard too, thinking that, maybe, the time come when I could get the old man a pair of pants to match his shirt.

As soon as I could catch breath I said:

"I guess you'll have to get some one else to run your old mine, Elliot. I'm going with you, or I'm going alone."

"No, you're not, Bill," he replied, very quiet, but positive, "I'm tying to you to take care of things here till I get back. Suddoth is going with me."

"What? That tenderfoot? Not so you'd notice it. You'll need a real man or a real dozen or hundred. I guess I'll get the boys together, and we'll go down and chew up the whole Mexican army."

"And have the girl run down to Yucatan or some such place where we'll never see a hair of her again. Who's talking tenderfoot now? This job needs about a couple of good men on it, and you'll stay, Bill."



WELL I did! He talked me into it. I stayed, and he and Suds lit out, with an old Mexican of the Don's, named Pancha, that they took along for a guide, and left me the bag to hold. And then came a week of as weary waiting as any one could wish for, till one morning the Don came in and planked a letter down on the desk; I ripped it open in a hurry, for it was Elliot's writing, but there was mighty little to it. Only said they had struck a trail and were in the mountains and following a band, and hoped things were going well at the mine, and to tell the Don, which I did.

And then nothing for another ten days or so, till one night, when I was catching a bit of a nap in the office, I was woke up by a hollering at the door.

I grabbed a gun first, then cried—

"Who's there?"

"Suddoth!" came a voice, and there was a funny catch to it, that I gave one jump and got the door opened, and there, sure enough, was Suds, on a horse that was pumping from his toes, and on the crupper of his saddle a big bundle that he was holding awful tight.

"Take Donna Isabel!" he went on, in that same thin, toneless way, and I jumped some more and grabbed the bundle and carried it inside, and laid it down on my

couch and turned just in time to see Suds slipping off the horse. He came staggering in, lay down on the floor, and even as I looked at him, began to snore.

There I was standing between those two dead-to-the-world people, the Donna on the couch and Suds on the floor, wondering what on earth to do next. Isabel's face was warm, and her pulse was beating all right, so I turned to Suds for reasons, but I might as well have tried to wake Pharaoh's mummy, so I gave it up.

Then I put the wraps back around the girl, gathered her up in my arms, and started to take her home. Say! I want to tell you it was some job I'd tackled. First time in my life I ever tried to carry a woman in my arms, and believe me, the story writers have it all wrong. It was about a half mile to the Don's 'dobe, and by the time I reached it I was bushed, but I made a bluff and rapped, and you should have seen his old face when he found what was in the package.

"Just dead sleepy!" I said, so as not to scare him, and carried her in, laid her down on the bed back of the curtain, then came out and away and left him alone with her.

The office door was still wide open when I got back, with the horse standing in front of it, and Suds snoring on the floor; so I took the poor beast back to the stable, fed and watered him, then went in and made a pot of coffee. I drank a lot of it and sat and looked at that Easterner. Some used-up looking gent he was, take it from me. His face was thin and peaked, there were black marks under his eyes, and I saw right then that he wouldn't have any use for that pot of coffee. So I pulled his boots off, unhitched his belt and undid his shirt neck, and got some of his outside clothes away, and finally lifted him on the couch where he looked a little more comfortable.

Well, I put in the rest of the night smoking and watching him, drinking his share of the coffee, and most of the next day as well, and all he did was snore and moan a little now and then.

The boys came around at noon and stood and talked in whispers, and the same way at night. They wanted to know where Elliot was, and a lot of things I couldn't tell them, so I shoosed them away and shut the door and started in to cook some supper. And then all of a sudden came Suds' voice—

"Never mind cooking that bacon any more, Bill."

I swung round and there was my man sitting up in bed, with his eyes glued on the frying-pan, and his mouth literally watering.

Well, I gave it to him, and some coffee, and a chunk of bread. He went to eating, and I went to cooking, and, believe me, I was sure some busy Billy boy, till all at once he laid down his empty cup and leaned back in his chair and gave a great sigh.

"Ah!" he said. "I guess I'm full."

"You ought to be," I answered.

He took no notice of me, but began to feel around in what clothes I'd left on him, and then spying the rest on a chair got up and searched out a package of those funny Mexican cigars, all one size and no binder on. When he got one of those lit and going good he leaned back and began to puff away. Then bounced up all at once and grabbed me by the arm.

"The donna?" he questioned. "Where's Isabel?"

"Isabel is with her pa," I answered, "now get busy and dig up the details."

"Did I have a good sleep?" he ignored my question entirely. "I feel pretty well rested."

"Did you have a good sleep? I should smile! You camped down on the floor there, and went under, and I toted the dame over to her pa's, and came back and undressed you—put you to bed—tucked you in, and have played little Willie's guardian angel for about twenty hours. Yes! I guess you had a good sleep, all right!"

"Great Scott! Twenty hours!" he mused for a spell, then, "did you say you carried the donna all the way home?"

"I did, and it was some job."

"You bet it was!" he answered with a heap of fervor. "Say, Bill! That girl—and believe me, old top, she is a mighty fine girl too—went to sleep in my arms on top of that horse, last night. For the first fifteen minutes it was heaven; then it began to turn to work, and once or twice I thought it was Tommy Suddoth to the rock-ribbed trail, with a broken head and a hundred and fifty pounds of femininity on his neck."

"Oh! Quit the frivolity," I growled, for this business of him holding Isabel in his arms didn't appeal to me a cent's worth. "How did you get away, and what's come of Elliot?"

"I guess Elliot's still a prisoner, but I reckon he's safe enough. They caught him

scouting, but they've got a bunch of Americans of one kind and another with them, and they're not going to hurt him any. I just took the girl and came away."

"Gee whiz!" I snapped. "But how?"

"Oh! Just grabbed her! It wasn't any very hard stunt. They're only Greasers, you know."

"Greasers can shoot."

"Yes, I believe they did do a little. But I was between them and the girl, so they couldn't hit her at all."

Well sir, it made me tired to hear him ramble along like that. Of course any man would be glad to be between the girl and the guns, but I had no idea Suds was so modest—he'd never struck me that way before—but I couldn't get any details out of him at all, and when I pressed him, he asked me if I'd ever eaten turtles' eggs. I said what I had to say about turtle eggs, and he made believe to agree with me.

"If you've never eaten any, don't tackle them," he mused. "They're not in it with your bacon. I lost the chuck some way, and we nearly starved on the way back; till one spell when I was resting the horse, I noticed a few on the side of a gully, and went to digging. They staved off the hunger all right, but young turtle, two weeks in the shell—only there isn't any shell—well it doesn't taste good, raw. I guess the lady thought so too."

And that was all I could get out of him.

"Quit the jollying," I snapped at last, "or I'll bat you. That's straight. How about Elliot?"

"Why, you ill-tempered nut! He's a prisoner. I don't know who the crowd are that has him, but Pancha's trailing them. He's safe enough. I suppose they'll want a ransom."

"Then they won't get it. I'll arm up a bunch of the boys, and we'll go down and get him out."

"Say!" he answered, sitting up quick. "That's a good idea of yours, only we don't need any boys. Just you and me. They're only Greasers."

"Shucks! Haven't you any sense at all? Maybe they are just a bunch of Mex's, but they run the lady off from under our eyes. What good are two in a case like this?"

"I don't know how much good you may be, Bill," he drawled, "but there were just two of us went after the lady, and she is back, isn't she?"

Well, he had me. He sure did! What could I say? Not one word! So I just sat, like a coon up a tree that's being chopped down, and he went ahead and laid it all out, how we'd pick up Pancha, and hold up the bunch of Greasers, and take Elliot, and pull him out, and then we'd come back, and—oh, I don't know what.

His pipe was working no end, and I gave up. Anyway, after the dig he'd given me, I was it; so we talked it over and decided to leave in the morning, and I went out and rapped up old man Thompson, and his wife came to the door in her nightie with a gun, and I nearly got my head shot off. When she saw who it was, though, she let me in. I put the mine in his care and asked him to explain to the boys, and tell them to be good. He kicked like a roped steer, also, and wanted to come along, but his wife took him in tow and I beat it quick.

Suds was singing when I went in, at least, that's what he said it was, and was looking over weapons and getting things ready for the journey, as happy as a clam. So, as I was feeling some grouchy, myself, and likewise sleepy, and he'd just got back from Snoozeland, I turned in and left him at it.

I slept fine that night, waking at sunrise. We had a good breakfast, got the horses round and our dunnage packed, and were clearing out just as the first shift was going in to the mine. We were too far away to have any talking, but they let out a yell for your whiskers, and it sure did me good, till I got to thinking, all at once, that the odds were I'd never see any of them any more, and then things didn't look so rosy. But just about this time we hit the chaparral, and I came back to earth with a jolt.



SOME folks claim to like this chaparral stuff, and they can have it. I don't! That's straight! Of all the mean things on the face of this earth, it's it. Every stream in the Southwest has it on both sides, and even when there's a trail through it, like the one we were following, it's mean enough, and the bush on each side is full of snakes, and bob-cats, and bandits and the Lord only knows what, all ready and more than willing to snatch a piece of your hide and leave with it.

And when you've got a crazy companion, who persists in making a row that he calls singing, believe me, it sure is some rotten place. I was certainly glad when we'd ford-

ed the river, and were out on dry land again, with the blue sky over us. I took one look behind and, as we topped a rise, got my last look at the smelter chimney of the old mill, and the next moment it was gone, and at one slice, so it seemed, my old life was cut out and I was into a new business. I've had that feeling several times, but never quite so bad as that one.

Anyway, we were set for old Mexico, and elected for trouble, and, as the chimney vanished, Billy boy took a new hitch, settled a little more firmly in the saddle, the mine boss dropped away, and a regular border ruffian took his place.

You see, it's this way: A guy takes his young life in his hand in a game like ours, and there's a whole lot of other guys standing round or sneaking behind, plenty willing to grab it for a dollar, Mex. So away went sentiment, and out came cold blood, and me for a grim look in the face of death, and a mighty handy notion to send the other fellow there first. We didn't have the slightest excuse to be down there, and any paltry Greaser with a gun could blow a whole lot of painful holes in a fellow's back and beat it out of sight instanter. And there was a plenty willing to do the job up right, being as hostile as a hydrophobia skunk, and just about as poison mean.

The first thing I did was to shut up Suds' singing, which was some gain in more than one way, his bump of harmony being a hole, I guess, and we rode along with our eyes peeled for every little sign or suggestion. The blessed country had been marched over and fought over till it was bare as a Mexican poodle's back.

At one place we came across the trail of an army division that looked mighty new, and it gave me chills to think what would happen if any of their scouts should come wandering along and see our track cutting theirs, but we had to take chances and beat it along with our chins on our shoulders. But luck was ours that time, and night found us camped in a little pocket among the hills where there would be some show to put up a scrap if we were jumped, which we wasn't. We lived off cold meat, for even Suds had sense enough to know that it would not do to start a fire, and next morning mighty early, I tell you, we were on the way again.

Three days and nights we put in like this, keeping clear of any buildings and picking

out the wildest trails, till all at once Suds began to sniff around like a setter.

"What's bit you?" I questioned.

"It is somewhere around here that a blear-eyed old Mexican lives, who is in touch with Pancha. We've got to find him, for he may have news. Keep your eye peeled for something that looks like the tumbled-downest hog-pen you ever saw. If it's bad enough, that's it."

We found it that day about sundown, though I don't believe any decent hog would live in it; but the old Mex made us welcome, gave us some supper, news of Pancha, and the route we were to follow. If hogs wouldn't live in the place, though, other things did, and I finally took my blankets and beat it outdoors, and watched the blue sky and the stars, and thought what a couple of idiots we were, till I dropped off to sleep.

Next day we started out in good season, and if we had been careful before, we trod on eggs now. Two days it was, till we hit another house where a gent without any suspenders came out and gave a grave *amigo* to Suds.

I was kind of fascinated at the way he held his pants up with one hand and talked with the other, then forgot and talked with both, and then, with a wild dive, saved his trousers in the nick of time. It was sure some stunt he pulled off, but he seemed a decent kind of guy enough and sent a thin-shanked kid along with us—who didn't have any pants at all—to show us the way. And when, all at once, we bumped into Pancha, squatting in a hole in a rock, I felt as if we had landed somewhere at last.

We had, too, for over our meal he told us that the detachment had split up the day before, and a bunch of some twenty bandits were carrying about ten prisoners, Americans and Spaniards mostly, into the mountains, and that Elliot was among them. They had been treated well enough up to date, but he had a hunch that there was something in the wind, and that they were pretty sore at our supe because of the escape of Donna Isabel.

That ended it, as far as Suds was concerned, and he wanted us two to go and hold up the whole crowd by our lonesome, but Pancha remarking that he guessed they would camp out in an old deserted mine building next night, he let it go at that and went to sleep instead.

Then I had a talk with the old man, and from what he told me, I had a guess coming we were in the same boat as the man the mule kicked—up against it good and plenty. However, it wasn't going to do any good worrying over things, so I turned in also and went to sleep same as Suds.

Next day was some rocky proposition, in more ways than one, for Pancha took us a short cut through the mountains, which mostly was a case of scrabbling along on a three-foot path, a thousand feet up in the air, with a nice lot of rocks at the bottom of a chasm for a fellow to fall on if he made a slip. We left our horses with the pantless boy, for it wasn't any horse business we were on, and I didn't blame the other outfit a little bit for taking the long way round.

We came up to their camp just before sundown and had time to get a good look at it, and all the facts clear in our minds before dark, and I'm free to say I didn't cotton to the outlook a little bit, not so you'd notice any wild joy, I didn't. Suds saw it different.

"There's the place we'll go in," he breezed, "right at that door there, and hold up the whole gang, just like one of our train robbers would hold up a Pullman coach. You'll stand in the door and flourish a couple of revolvers, while I pull a couple more, and then I'll go in and bring Elliot out, and we'll just come away. No need to hurt anybody, I guess," he finished casually.

Pancha's eyes were bugging, though he seemed to have a heap more confidence in Suds than I did, for he nodded his head as if that settled it. I'm thinking that crazy Easterner must have pulled some awful job when he got the donna, for an old hand like Pancha to take such guff so quiet.

Anyway, when dark fell—and it sure gets black in old Mexico—we three sneaked down to the building, keeping a keen eye out for sentries. I suppose they felt pretty safe, however, for there wasn't any, and presently we were all rubbering through the window.

Say, it sure was some motley crowd in there, and it took us a little time to dig Elliot out, where he sat over to one side, with a bunch of patriots and things around him. And right there I was knocked all of a heap, for while all the rest of the prisoners were disarmed, he had a belt on, and I could see the butt of a revolver sticking out of the holster.

"What have they left his gun for?" I asked of Pancha, but he only shook his head, and I noticed a puzzled look on his face.

I turned back to my window and picked up Elliot again. Just then he swung round, and I got a good stare at his face, and say, there was the oddest look on it, like he had been drinking and was half pickled. His eyes wandered back and forward over the floor, and the crowd and the ceiling of the shack, though you knew he was never seeing a thing, just looking through them at something else. His lips were muttering to himself, and he seemed as if under strong excitement, which he was holding in with an effort.

Presently his hand fell down and began playing with the gun. And then I got a shock, for a couple of ragged patriots standing close by, leaned over as Elliot moved, their eyes shining viciously, and quick as winking out came their pops, and I saw them ready and willing, yes, darned anxious to shoot. Well, I covered them, of course, and was just about to let go, when the supe took his hand away, back went their guns, they straightened up again and looked disappointed as all get out.

For quite a little spell I stood watching him, wondering what the matter could be. One might almost have fancied he'd been at a bottle, but I knew the supe didn't drink any, at least to that extent. Then I got another shock, for a hand fell on my arm, and I turned to beat the head off somebody, and looked down into Pancha's face. It was pretty white and full of puzzled wonder. Like myself, he had seen the by-play of the patriots and knew there was some mean game in the wind; but whatever it was, it had us both winging.

So I went back to my window again, and Pancha rubbered over my shoulder. Presently Elliot looked up again with a wild stare that went all over the room and back again. His eyes even glared out through the window we were at, though he didn't seem to see us, then back to the floor again, and vacant as an empty demijohn. It sort of hurt me to see him act like that, him being generally so sure and self-contained. Anyway it got my goat, and I was standing there wondering what in Sam Hill we could do, when I felt old Pancha tighten a grip on my arm again, and he stuck his head up against my ear.

"*Marihuana!*" he whispered, and for a

moment I stared at him, then the meaning of it all came with a flash, the whole devilish plot was clear, and I gave Suds a poke in the ribs that made him grunt.

"Get your bluff to working quick," I snapped, "or it'll be too late. Come on! Get a wiggle on before they put Elliot's light plumb out. Get busy!" and I started for the door, with Pancha following.

Quick as we were, however, Suds was ahead, passed us like a streak, and pushed in at the door before us, waving a gun in each fist.

"Hands up!" he yelled. "Every son of a toad stick his hands up, or I'll plug him full of lead. Hands up, I say!"

Well sir, those desperate patriots sure did look silly, standing there with their mouths open, looking at the three of us, just inside the doorway, and for a moment or two I thought we were it, for fair. I guess we were a grim-looking outfit enough though, and we sure had a dead drop on everybody, so when Suds poked a fat decorated gent in the paunch with the muzzle of his revolver, that person shot his hands up so hard, it pulled him off his chair, and the rest of the patriots did the same thing *pronto*.

Suds relieved the fat party of a nice automatic, then swung round to where a bunch of prisoners were herded up in one corner close to us.

"You look American!" he snapped out to a tall person who was kind of edging up out of the ruck. "Are you?"

"You bet I am!"

"Then take this," he went on, shoving the automatic over, "and get busy. Give me a hand with this Greaser mob, before they get excited and we have to hurt somebody."

Well sir, it sure was some treat to watch those two go down the crowd, while Pancha and I stood guard at the door. It was so darned funny I forgot to be nervous, though I kept my eyes peeled just the same for some trick to be pulled off, and as soon as it was safe, chased Pancha outside to head off anybody who might be inclined to kick us in the pants.

Suds sure threw his soul into the job he had started, and the tall guy was no slouch either. As fast as they rustled a gun from a patriot, there was a gringo near by to grab it, and they worked the soldiers off into a corner by themselves, and a sour-looking bunch they were, for a fact.

Six good United Staters we got out of the crowd, and when I saw them all armed and lined up with us, each man with blood in his eye and weary for a scrap, believe me, I felt a heap safer, and took time for a long breath. Then I wandered down to Elliot who was still sitting on his bench, looking hard at nothing, just as I'd seen him from the window.

"Bulls!" he said, as I went over to him, and grabbed me by the arm. "And steers!"

"Sure, old man! Let's get away from them," I answered, and cajoled the poor guy down to the doorway.

Me and Pancha led him off between us, while the rest of the bunch kept the Greaser outfit herded so we could get a fair start. They didn't stop any too long at that, and when they did come, every blessed one was staggering under patriot rifles and things, most of which we dumped down the chasm. Likewise they were packing a load of chuck, they had rustled from somewhere, due, I reckon to the thoughtful dislike of Suds for turtle eggs.

Say, it was some job we had of it, you can bet, especially along those rocky ledges, but the ten of us finally made it to the horses, and Pancha, bless his copper-colored hide, dug more mounts up from somewhere, and like the woman with the thieving pup, we sure did beat it, taking chances enough to make a thoughtful man shiver.

Elliot had a scrappy time of it next day, which is the way the dope works, wanting to fight the bunch of us, but came out of it finally, and never knew a thing, only stared at the crowd like some loony, till Suds, who had been bottled up much longer than was good for him, breezed in.

"What was wrong with you, supe?" he queried. "Booze?"

Elliot shook his head, a heap puzzled.

"I don't know what the matter is or was," he answered. "It seems to me I've had a kind of nightmare."

And the poor guy was so woozy and all out as it might be, that to ease his mind I went ahead and detailed the whole business. He listened mighty thoughtful, and when I got through, his first question was about Donna Isabel. Then he turned from one to the other of us.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"*Marihuana!*" I answered.

"Spell it!" snapped Suds, "and what is it?"

"I guess it's a root, and they give it a guy and he goes dippy, *pro tem*. If he gets too much, he's looney for the rest of his life. Fills a fellow's belfry full of bats. First he sees animals, quiet ones, then they begin to run rings around him, then bulls and steers come, and then the poor cuss goes clean bugs and begins to scrap."

Elliot looked scared, and Suds looked puzzled.

"I don't get the deal at all! Why should they do it? It seems a senseless game to me, to go to all that trouble. Sure you ain't away off, Bill? Would they have left him his gun?"

"Cert!" I replied. "That was part of the game. Didn't you see the ragged army all waiting to blow his head off the minute he pulled it. The way I've got it figured out is, they have to watch out for Uncle Sam at present, and to kill Elliot out of hand would be bad policy, so they fixed up this little game. Savvy? If they could get Elliot to start some kind of a row, draw a gun and shoot, it would give them a grand excuse to blow his head off, and nobody could say a word. So they make this poor guy dippy with dope, and then stand around to wait for the fatal moment, when, *bing! bang!* and there ain't any more supe."

"Oh! Ho!" said Suds. "I see their playful way of doing things. But still it seems as though they were taking a chance to leave his pistol with him. Some one might have been hurt."

"Not in a month of Sundays," I answered. "I've got a bet down that his pop is loaded with blanks."

"If that's so, it settles it," replied Suds, and Elliot, nodding, opened up his revolver, and sure enough it was just as I said. Not a bullet in the bunch.

The getting back to the mine was easy, and, believe me, I sure drew a deep breath when I saw its friendly tipple. But all this only proves what I remarked in the first place: Suds made good because he didn't know the proposition he was bucking, otherwise he never would have tried to hold up a chunk of the Mexican army thataway; neither would he have married Donna Isabel, which was a heap more serious from what I hear.

In this game he got a card from the bottom of the pack, for they tell me she sure does lead the poor guy a wild and stormy life.



A Ragged Mountain Romance by M. R. Cochrane

NEAR Charlottesville is a small range of gloomy hills tagging on to the Blue Ridge in its journey south. It is known locally as the Ragged Mountains. In these mysterious hills live the lost Hessians who were released from a prison camp near Charlottesville at the end of the Revolution.

Instead of making their way to the sea and thence back to Germany, they marched back into the Ragged Mountains. There they have kept free from inroads of civilization. Here, too, live the native mountaineers, a fearless, lawless folk of good Anglo-Saxon blood.

In the first heat of missionary fervor I had elected to teach a mission school in the heart of the Ragged Mountains. At three o'clock Friday, in November, I slammed the schoolhouse door with decisive fervor and turned the key with thanksgiving. It was raining.

Between the darkness of the storm and coming night the wood road lay ahead of me like some dark cave. After two miles of wind-whipped, rain-washed chastening, I reached my abiding place in a more amiable frame of mind, grateful for its warmth and cheer.

As I opened the cabin door a whiff of broiling bacon met me and the cobby smell was welcome as was "Miz" Graves's brisk greeting. Untroubled by domestic cares or invading schoolma'ams, a girl in her twenties leaned against the west window, looking up at the flying clouds with dream-troubled eyes. The profile line of the beautiful head and throat, also of the bust and

shoulders, was almost perfect in its symmetry. Even the listlessness of the relaxed figure in its motionless repose and the slim brown hands were startling in their beauty. Watching her, as I so often found myself doing, I felt more than ever the charm of her unconscious beauty and the pity of its rough setting.

From my vantage point I considered Miz Graves with renewed interest as she busied herself with our supper. The firelight accentuated the angular figure casting her shadow in grotesque silhouette upon the white-washed wall. The scant gray hair, strained back and tucked with one pin in a "Betty-Knot," the stern gray eyes, set in a face tanned by storms and suns of mountain living, bore no likeness to the girl. There was mystery in this—

House of dreams untold,
That looks out over the whispering tree tops,
And faces the setting sun.

As if conscious of the inner workings of my mind the old lady gave me a quick look. Something in her voice caught my attention; an undertone of irritation, when she called:

"Come, Joanna! The kittle's a-bilin'. Fetch Billy, then steep the tea."

The summons had to be repeated before Joanna came down to earth and homely tasks.

After some delay the protesting youngster was fetched. Joan looked down into his steadfast gray eyes with adoration while he punctuated his prattle with pats on her cheeks. Here again I was up against mystery.

Supper was a silent meal. After, Joan

bore Billy off up the narrow, creaking stairs to her attic chamber. There I heard him wailing with full four-year-old lung power, bewailing his untimely off-taking.

I left Miz Graves "in the dish-pan" and settled myself to ruminate alone in the sitting-room. A fire of fat pine and hickory logs snapped and crackled on the hearth. Outside, the driving rain sounded as if from a great distance. Day had closed and the lonely mountain night had set in.

Perhaps I had slept more than forty winks when the bang of a blind brought me up with a start to find Miz Graves regarding me with enigmatic eyes. Then, without preamble, she began:

"I seen yo' a-takin' me an' Joanna's measure this evenin'. So fur you've been decent an' hain't bedeviled me 'bout the gyrl an' Billy-Boy like the rest of 'em."

She threw a fresh log on the fire which sent a shower of spitting sparks and kindled the soot in the chimney. Then, lighting her short corn-cob pipe, she rocked back and forth in the creaky old split-bottomed chair while waiting to get her thoughts into marching order. After a few preliminary puffs she resumed:

"Mebbe sleepin' dogs hed best not be woke, but you've been right good to us an' I reckon done decent by Joan even in your thoughts. Cur'os'ty an' spyin's what druv we-all back on to the Ragged Mountains, mean, nasty tongues, workin' like snakes in the grass, 'bout bus' Joanna's heart spang in two!"

Infinite pity softened the stern deep-set eyes, like sunlight striking across gray pools.

"They calls it murder when life is took an' thar's a punishmint that fits the crime, but when it's sump'n dearer'n life that's took—who pays?"

Here she took aim and spat scornfully upon the hissing coals, then continued:

 "COMIN' two years tonight Joanna an' Billy McTavish wuz spliced in a little 'Piscopal Church in Staunton. 'Twarn by the old Leviticus Law, I'm here to tell yo'! Things wuz all reg'lar in the sight o' Gawd an' man. The s'tif'cate's right in that cupboard in my Ruth an' Naomy teapot Ma give me. No ma'am. Nobody here on Little Spruce spicions she's married.

"You've figured out fer yo'self she's none

o' my child an' it don't take no very profound reasonin' nor eyes o' larnin' to reach that conclusion neither. But I reckon I've done mos' everything 'cept borned her. How I come by her is another story.

"After she an' Billy hed been a-keepin' comp'ny nigh onto two years, one night Joanna, she come to me mighty pacifyin', puttin' her han's on my shoulders an' says: 'Mammy Graves, Billy wants me for his wife. He's waiting out there in the moonlight for you.'

"He wuz mighty convincin' but I put him th'oo his catechism fer onct." Her eyelids snapped. "An what's more I let him onderstand that if he failed to make Joanna happy I'd give him a character, an' don't you fergit it! A nepitaph that would come nigher the truth than any he'd ever git on his tumstone! I rared an' pitched consider'ble. When I come too Billy wuz clutchin' me by the wrists, beggin' me to stop. He took on as if I wuz degradin' men folks in gen'ral an' him in partikeler.

"Joanna she's hed a hard row to hoe an' nuthin' to pay for the diggin'. She hain't been stinted noways ez to money, but, by Gosh! What's money when yo' looks into them eyes o' her'n an' sees the questionin'? Mos' every night she slips out thar in the darkness an' fights it out alone."

Her hands clenched until muscles and veins stood out like whip-cord, while she stared gloomily into that difficult past. After a moment of deep quiet she looked up and said:

"Well, 'taint no use in cryin' over spilt milk—nor yet letin' it soak in! Anyways, she's hed two happy years that cyarn' be took from her, an' she's got Billy-Boy. Sometimes, I reckons—but I'm a-gittin' my cyart before my horse.

"Billy an' Joanna wuz married in early November. 'Twuz the year they run the road th'oo Waynesboro. Billy wuz one o' the bosses on the job.

"'Bout the last o' November, I reckillet the day wuz gray and raw. To'des evenin' the wind come on sharper and night closed in with a wet, blindin' fall o' snow—the first of the season.

"We sot a-waitin' for Billy. Ten o'clock come, then 'leven an' twelve, but no Billy. Joanna, she wuz sweatin' like a June bride gettin' all nerved up. Presen'ly I heered a shufflin' outside in the snow, then somebody cracked at the doo' fit to bus' it wide open.

Joanna, she jumped like a hunted hyah an' says: 'It's Billy! Sumpin's happened!'

"Sumpin' certainly hed happened all right. Thar stood a passel o' railroad han's holdin' a stretcher. On it wuz a peck o' trouble in the shape of a gyrl—a slip of a thing with a nasty ragged cut acrost her head. Cuddlin' clost aginst her wuz a child, his corn-silk curls a-flyin' to the wind an' he a-yellin' bloody murder.

"One o' the men spoke up an' says: 'There's been a wreck. South-bound plunged off'n the trussle; lots o' folks kilt an' hurt an' nowheres to tote 'em. Doctor sent these down to you an' says keer for that 'oman's head till he comes.'

"Somehow, Joanna she'd quieted that bundle o' shawls an' bawls. He wuz takin' solid comfort suckin' his thumb an' lookin' over the situation.

"They histed the gyrl onto Joanna's bed. 'Twarn long 'fore the doctor come, thank goodness! Fur I wuz pretty nigh 'stracted tryin' to stanch the blood. He punched and prodded, mutterin' a jumble o' physik-in' words that sounded 'bout as bad as that gyrl looked.

"Then he looked the boy over findin' him right as a trivet. When he left 'twuz nigh on to two o'clock. 'Bout three, Billy come in pretty nigh spent with the cold an' diggin' out them critters 'neath the wreck. Jes' ez soon ez he sot eyes on Joanna seemed like it put new life into him. Thar they stood lookin' into one 'nother's eyes when he had oughter be strippin' off them soakin' close—whilst Joanna wuz gettin' him sumpin' hot to drink. Beats all how love gits 'long with-out common sense nowdays!

"I stirred him up some comp'sition tea—ginger, red pepper, sugar an' hot milk, an' whilst he wuz drinkin' it I let on how they'd fetched two wreckers to our house. Then I druv him off to bed.

"'Twarn much me an' Joan could do 'cept keep up fires an' wet bandages. That poor critter wuz pow'ful oneasy—moanin' an' mutterin'. She looked mighty pretty layin' thar, her face flushed with fever an' her silky hair loose an' ripplin' over the pillow. Her little han's wuz so soft an' dimpled I dassent tech 'em with my hard, bony ones.

"Th'oo it all the baby slept—sometimes ketchin' his breath an' puttin' up his lips to cry even in his sleep. Joanna, she couldn' keep away from him. Kissin' his little

hands an' myratin' over his shock o' corn-silk curls. I 'lowed she'd wake him so I druv her off into the settin'-room. Thar she sot, her han's in her lap, her head leanin' 'ginst the chimbley, lookin' into the fire dream-weavin' with her big eyes brimmin' over with happiness.

"Jes' pass me them tongs—fire, like old folks, needs livnin' up!

"Well, 'twarn long 'fore Billy come stealin' down, movin' like a Injun, tall an' splendid—his stern face all smilin' an' them gray eyes flashin' love, jes' for Joanna! I hadn't oughter watch 'em but as Joanna sings—

There's nothin' half so sweet in life
As Love's young dream.

"An' thar hain't! To my dyin' day when I shets my eyes I'll see 'em as I seen 'em then—Billy standin' thar in the firelight with his han's on Joanna's shoulders, an' she with her pretty head throwed back an' her dark plaits a-danglin', whilst deep down in her eyes the lovelight a-leapin' to meet his'n. Billy spoke. An' Gawd A'mighty! 'Twuz like quickinin' the dead.

"With a cry an' spring like a painter that gyrl wuz out o' bed. Quicker'n scat she'd flung herself into Billy's arms, holdin' on to him like he wuz the Rock o' Ages. He staggered back so suddint—a little more'n he'd dropped her. His face had gone white an' his eyes wuz wide an' dark. Billy looked at Joan kinder helpless like, an' then in horror at that slim child in his arms sobbin' 'B-i-l-l-y' an' stickin' to him closer than a burr. Her bandage hed bus' loose an' the blood an' tears wuz minglin' an' drippin' down her cheeks. 'Fore I could reach her she hed fainted dead away.

"Billy he stood like one in a trance while I toted that gyrl back to the bed. I done what I could but she'd went into a stupor. It 'peared like I'd been workin' over her quite a spell when I heered Billy cry out in despyar, 'Joan. Oh Gawd! What have I done?'

"Then I heered Joan whisper, 'What—who—who is it?' Shieldin' her eyes like he wuz a-goin' to strike her.

"Nuthin' but the tick, tick of the clock and the poundin' of our hearts answered her. After a while Billy Spoke. I could jes ketch his words they come so low an' broken, when he said—

"The boy is mine, and she ought to be.'

"Joanna stood as if stunted, then she

turned on him with blazin' eyes an' says—

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Squarin' his shoulders and lookin' deep into her eyes he says—

"Gawd knows I tried, but I loved you so!"

"Joan kivered her eyes an' her han's wuz tremblin'. Billy took them gently in his'n an' says pleadin' like—

"Joan, yo' knows how I love yo'."

"She wuz readin' his very soul when she says, scornful like—

"Yore love is only equaled by yore honesty."

"He dropped her han's an' I seen him ketch his lip 'twixt his teeth. Then, he says, slow an' steady:

"This wuz done before I knew you. Nothing can alter the fact that I love you."

"He opened the doo' an' stepped out into the night."

 MIZ GRAVES relapsed into mountain taciturnity. Nothing broke the silence but the wind whipping across the chimney-top. After a while she rapped the ashes out of her pipe and wiping her mouth on her sleeve began:

"Next day they thrashed it out somehow 'twixt 'em. To'des evenin', Joan come into the kitchen an' says:

"Mammy Graves, I cyarn live with Billy after this. He mus' keer for her,' nod-din' her head to'des the bedroom. 'She's his wife in the sight o' Gawd an' man, an' I—I am——'

"Twarn no word to be spoke. I told her 'twuz all Torm-foolishness. Billy warn' no different from other men—only he wuz honest. His past b'longed to him. Twarn none o' her funeral. Twarn no use. I'd jes' as well gone an' beat my head 'ginst a stone wall. Joanna always wuz sot. She looked mighty forlorn but not a tear in them sorrowful eyes when she says:

"She loved an' trusted him first. I must leave him to her. Promise me you will take me home to Little Spruce.' I give in.

"Billy sot by the gyrl the endurin' night. But she was wild an' burnin' up with fever. Never knowed him 'cept that onct.

"My heart wuz hot 'ginst him—but I couldn't help pityin' him. He wuz struck from a clear sky, yet thar warn no whinin' nor yet no 'scuses. Lemme tell yo'—mighty few wimmins what don't larn thah lessons 'bout men folks sooner or later. Wild oats

is jes as pop'lar ez they uster be, yes'm', an' they gits sowed jes the same. But I'm browsin' out o' my own field.

"The gyrl wuz so bad by night that the doctor said she'd got to be took to the hospital next mornin'. They come bright an' early to fetch her. Billy went 'long with her o' co'se. Midst the rumpus of movin' her I'm blessed if we didn't clean fergit Billy-Boy till he lifted up his voice in meet-in'! Then it come to us what's to become o' him? I'll be bound if he didn't settle it all hisself by reachin' up them little arms for Joanna to take him.

"Billy writ us after several weeks the gyrl wuz 'bout the same.

"One evenin', 'bout sundown, Joanna, Billy-Boy and me wuz settin' in the fire-light. The Winter light wuz shimmerin' th'oo the windows an' the house wuz mighty still an' lonesome, when all of a suddint somebody cracked at the doo' an' Joan called, 'Come in!' Thah stood Billy! He stepped inside and closed the doo' behind him. He wuz mighty white, with deep lines 'round his lips—drawed by the pain in his heart, I reckon.

"A shadow clouded Joan's eyes when she seen him, then the color flowed into her white cheeks. I heered Billy ketch his breath sharp. He walked over an' stood before Joanna lookin' down at her with questionin', eager eyes.

"Well?" he said.

"At that Billy-Boy clim up into Joan's lap an' cuddled clost 'ginst her.

"I've come for the boy—poor little devil he knows it."

"Sure 'nough he spicioned it. Joan gathered the child to her breast, lifted her eyes full of pleadin' to Billy's an' says, half sobbin':

"Don't take him! He's all I've got now."

"Billy knelt down beside her and put both arms 'round 'em. I crep' away an' lef' 'em. They talked late into the night. Next mornin' things wuz settled. Joanna wuz to keep Billy-Boy till his ma could have him.

"I fit 'ginst it but 'twarn no use. We moved up here the followin' week. Here we've been ever sence. But Billy's visits to Joan an' the boy is a-brewin' trouble—shore's shot out the shovell!

"Las' night when I shet up the house I found this slipped under the doo' jam."

She reached into the pocket of her calico skirt and drew out a soiled, crumpled paper. Opening it I made out by the firelight—

Make yo'self skeerce or next time I'll git yo' shore's—!

Miz Graves nodded and held out her hand for the slip of paper. After musing awhile, with vacant eyes, she said:

"Fools hain't even skeerce in this Gawd-forsaken country." A wary look came into her eyes. "But they've got to move quick to git ahead o' me, sho' thing. I can't jes say what's happened, but reckonin's easy, an' I've figured it out p-r-e-t-y nigh the truth, I'm thinkin'.

"Yo' knows Jerry Sprouse? His pappy's got a still back on the mountain an' the Gov'ment officers been keepin' mighty clost watch. He's liable to be ketched mos' any time. He's a surly, mean varmint an' now he's druv to the wall he's wus. Either he's a-layin' for Billy thinkin' he's a-spyin' on him, or hits Jerry, the boy. Hain't yo' seen him hangin' 'roun' Joan? He's the feller that brings yore mail. He's big—'bout Billy's build—black eyes an' curly hair—han'some lummux 'nough but a devil when he's jealous, an' the bes' shot in Albemarle County, I reckon, 'cep'n his dad. Well, he's took a shine to Joanna an' it's a-goin' to be pull Dick, pull devil, till he finds out who's bes' man.

"I've knowed them Sprouses, root an' branch, spit an' spawn, sence time wuz. That's been bad blood 'twixt them an' my folks always. Prob'ly you ain't heered 'twuz Jerry's father that kilt my man? They'd fit off'n on for years when one mornin' Joe—that's my man—he went a-choppin' over beyant Dove Creek. When evenin' come an' Joe didn't; mammy an' me sot out th'oo the pines to look fer him. The snow wuz deep an' travelin' slow, but after while we tracked him. After trailin' blood nigh on to a mile we found him, his guts ripped out, but he'd headed fer home.

"'Twarn no use to 'quire into it—least-ways we-all knowed better!

"Now, one or t'other's got it in for Billy, an' he's goter stop comin'. But who's a-goin' to stop him an' how? That's whar the shoe pinches. It's up to yo' or me. Sleep on it an' tell me what yo' thinks."

The back log broke in two with a shower of sparks. I said good night to Miz Graves and left her raking out the red coals and covering them with ashes to keep till morn-

ing. I went to bed, but not to sleep, only to torture myself with fear.

Knowing the brutal instincts of that animal clan made me realize the possibilities for tragedy and necessity for action. But what to do? Three lone, lorn females and a baby, 'way off on Little Spruce in that sparsely settled country! Nothing save a mountain cabin here and there with miles and miles of forest between us and Charlottesville. As if to emphasize my helplessness the wind came surging up through the pines, driving sleet and rain against my windows, and sleep away from my eyes.

One straw of comfort I had to cling to—there was a tradition that no one but a Hessian ever harmed a woman in the Ragged Mountains—and I believe the native mountaineers live up to it to this day. Encouraged by this comforting thought I must have fallen asleep, but not for long. My little ticking devil went off, as usual, at six-thirty with such vim that I came up like a sky-rocket, unwinding myself from the sheets.



IT HAD cleared in the night and my room was flooded with sunshine.

The air was washed clean and the clearing was snappy with frost—every wayside weed, stick and stone was powdered with diamond dust.

Shaking off sleep and dull care I plunged into my clear, cold tub, dressed quickly and hurried down to the kitchen. That, too, was full of sunshine and the aroma of coffee. Miz Graves bade me a brisk "Good morning" as she moved about preparing our breakfast.

Miz Graves and I were not the only troubled ones on Little Spruce. Joan had moved restlessly the night before in her room next to mine. Her eyes had dark shadows under them and laughter and tears were very close together when she spoke.

Quite on the impulse of the moment, she came in with a letter in her hand and said:

"Mammy, Billy's mother died last night. The result of the injury to her head at the time of the wreck." The hand that held the letter was trembling.

Despite her letter, Joan was feeling lonely as she sat on the little back porch overlooking the Blue Ridge Mountains and day-dreamed. On the other hand, Miz Graves's spirits had risen with a bound. As she cleared the table she whispered, in passing—

"That lets yo' an' me out for a spell."

On the following morning work began again. The daily routine ran smoothly enough.

Many days and evenings passed uneventfully. Sometimes Joan would come to meet me. Invariably Jerry would join her, idling in the sunshine of those lonesome mountains, looking at Joan with adoring eyes. Once, in desperation, I heard him exclaim—

"Joan, yo' shore do 'mind me of a sleep-walker; yo' air here in the body, but whar is yore sperrit?"

She flashed a smile at him, answered him with unvarying sweetness, then fell silent again.

Gradually, Jerry began to prove that he was a lover not to be despised. His invasions were more frequent and persistent. Several evenings Miz Graves surprised him slinking around the house "an' sont him 'bout his business" with a few well-chosen words. For a few days he'd sulk, then back again he'd come with peace offerings. Our larder was well stocked with partridges, turkey and rabbits.

About nine o'clock, one evening, Jerry rode in with the mail. I was stranded in the sitting-room, Miz Graves had gone up to bed, and Joan was in the kitchen.

It was with misgiving that I saw him throw down his hat and draw a letter out of his pocket, saying—

"Miss Joan, I reckon this is from yo' feller, but nairy a letter do yo' git ontill yo' tell me a thing or two!"

Full of suppressed excitement, he took a step nearer, holding the letter tantalizingly above her head. Leaning nearer to bring his eyes on a level with hers, he demanded:

"I say, Joan, honest! Crost yore heart. What's McTavish to yo' an' why does he keep a-hantin' this house an' writin'?"

Joan looked at him gravely under her level brows and said—

"Ask him."

Baffled and angered he moved toward her.

"I say," he demanded, "I say, what's Billy-Boy to yo'? That's a riddle we-all can't solve!"

To my surprise she lifted her clear, calm eyes and answered gently—

"Nothing—no kin at all."

He was ugly in a flash. Grasping her wrists he jerked her toward him, muttering hoarsely:

"—— yo'! I—b'lieve yo' air lyin'. Folks says he's yore love child."

This time he struck fire from flint. Wrenching one hand free she struck him across the mouth. He laughed mockingly while holding her off, then, suddenly throwing his arms about her, he strained her to his breast, his blue eyes black with passion. Each time she struggled or tried to make some outcry he held her closer, silencing her with hot kisses. Then with a certain wildness he flung her from him and was gone.

Joan stood with head bent and clenched hands, unconscious of my presence as I passed on my way up-stairs.

It was late the next afternoon when I bade good-by to my little tow-headed mountaineers. Such a varied assortment, and most of them "Finished and finite clods untroubled by a spark." They scurried off as fast as their legs could carry them down the wood road.

The air was keen and frosty, but I lingered to watch the sun drop behind the hazy line of the Blue Ridge. The mountain was very still. Presently, out of the distance came a peal of laughter—the jangling of lunch pails—then silence. The great pines whispered as their branches swayed gently to the breeze, whispering, perhaps, of by-gone tragedies. And I moved on slowly musing, too, of some that were still old women's chimney-corner talk. I had noticed though when told to me, by the cabin firesides, that it was always when the men folks were conspicuous by their absence. Miz Graves said it was—

"'Cause they' wuz feared to rouse old feuds and waken sleepin' dogs."

A molly cottontail darted out, crossed and recrossed my path. I, being Southern and therefore superstitious, promptly made a cross, spat in it and took a short cut for home.



THE sound of water rippling over rocks drew me to Dove Creek.

Sitting down under an overhanging ledge of rock, I watched the swirling water. Chancing to lift my eyes, I saw Jerry creeping stealthily down the cliff. Every movement was soft and lithe as a panther's. Swinging by his hands from a low-hanging pine branch, he dropped lightly into the road where the pine tags lay thick and soft.

Nothing stirred. Only Jerry's figure

stood clear-cut against the evening sky as he stood with head bent listening. Then there was a soft rustle in the laurels across the creek.

Suddenly shadow and silence were cut by a spurt of flame and the crack of a rifle. Jerry staggered, turned and ran, then pitched forward on his face.

The blood surged up from my heart and I was paralyzed with a choking fear. Presently, a man stealing out from behind the laurels, dropped his smoking rifle to the earth, muzzle up. He stood leaning heavily upon it, and I heard his laboring breath as he muttered thickly:

"By Gawd! I—got—him. Shore's—!"

As he turned I saw 'twas Jerry's father. Facing him, as if sprung from the earth, stood Miz Graves like some austere, avenging Nemesis.

"Hit's—yo," she panted. "What'd yo' shoot at—who?"

She stared at him with dilated, terrified eyes. He eyed her insolently before answering slowly—

"That——spyin' son of——"

Then, somewhere, out of that horrible nightmare I heard my voice crying as if from a great distance:

"It's Jerry! J-e-r-r-y! Down there in—the-road."

Sprouse turned on me like an animal snarling—

"Yo' liel!"

He lifted a threatening hand, but lurched after Miz Graves who was striding down the path. I followed down the gorge to where that silent body lay so close to the earth, face buried in the pine-needles and drifted leaves.

Dove Creek gurgled and laughed as it raced down the mountain. A breeze played fitfully with the rustling leaves and a squirrel scolded from a near-by hickory-nut tree.

Miz Graves dropped on her knees and tenderly turned Jerry over. Stooping lower she peered into his white face. As the head sagged limply to one side, Sprouse sprang past me making an odd, choking sound in his throat.

Over the dead boy they confronted each other panting. They stared at each other with questioning intensity.

"Jed—Jed!" burst from the man—a cry of anguish and despair wrung from his tor-

tured heart. "Son—speak to yore dad! Twarn yo' I aimed to git."

Flinging himself upon his knees, he was tearing open Jerry's shirt when Miz Graves pushed his hands away and whispered:

"S—sh! Listen!" Holding up her hand. "Jerry's dead—dead. Kin yo' hear? An' yo' kilt him! Air yo' so full of corn whisky even this hain't sobered yo'?"

Her voice had risen now to a passionate wail of accusation. Sprouse had risen and was listening with a curious grim intentness, his sullen eyes fixed upon hers.

"Ezry Sprouse, all these years yo've hugged the notion that I hain't spicioned who 'twuz that kilt my Joe. 'Twuz yo' that done hit! Yo', 'cause he come atween me an' yo'—an' I loved him. But this time, hits yore heart's blood yo' done drawn. Yo've kilt the onlies' thing that ever loved yo'! Fer onct hits up to yo' to answer to a co'te what that's no appeal. Yore caught in a trap of yore own makin'!"

Her mouth hardened grimly and a gleam of satisfaction lighted her gray eyes. During the momentary hush we turned, hearing echoing hoof-beats, and found a man riding up the trail. Flinging himself from the saddle, he hurried toward us. As he came, Sprouse's hand stole toward his rifle. I knew, intuitively, it must be McTavish when he asked:

"What's the trouble here? Who shot Jerry?"

Unable to reply, Sprouse stood impassive, staring down at Jerry. Miz Graves' strong old hands clenched and her eyes were full of that hatred that knows no forgiveness when she spoke.

"Hit's Ezry's work," pointing to Sprouse. "The bullet that got Jerry wuz 'tended fer yo'. He's a-lyin' yonder whar yo' jes missed lyin', thanks to Ezry's bein' full o' corn whisky! An' ef he'd failed to git yo'—look a-here."

She pointed to an old army pistol still clutched in Jerry's hand.

"Now, yo' be off, Ezry Sprouse," she ordered. "Go quick an' fetch yo' mule an' cyart."

Sprouse drew his hand across his eyes as if dazed, then shuffled off slowly across the clearing toward his cabin.

I watched him thro' a winking mist of tears. My knees began to cave in, then the earth reeled. I felt myself sinking into bottomless darkness. Groping for something tangible, then going—g-o-i-n-g, gone.

When I found myself, my plight was like the old woman's who fell asleep on the King's Highway. My eyes smarted; I had disconcerting sensations at the back of my head and my hair was wetter than the wettest rat and strongly odorous of camfor.

Raising myself carefully on one elbow, I listened. What followed was more like a dream than a waking reality. There was a confusing murmur of voices. Darkness encompassed me, but gathered around the sitting-room fire I could see a united family.

I was conscious of really seeing McTavish for the first time. He was of powerful build, lean and muscular, but even in his

clumsy corduroys his figure was shapely. His handsome face flushed with the Winter cold was strong with a strength not purely physical.

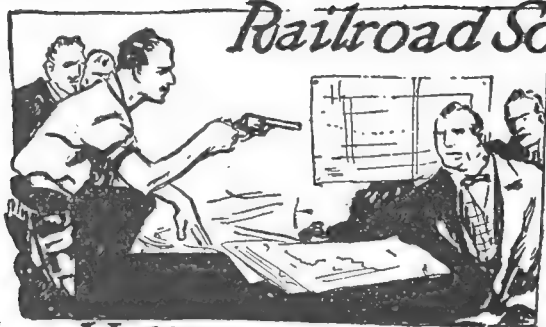
Joan stood in the firelight facing him, her head thrown back and her eyes very tender and shining. Her voice was so low I failed to catch what she was saying, but in the midst of it McTavish leaned over and caught her to his breast. I heard him say:

"God! How I love you."

"An' me, too?" shrilled Billy-Boy from the rug.

Twilight settled over Little Spruce and over all a spirit of restful quiet.

Billy June and the Amazon Railroad Scandal



by
Wilbur Hall

Author of "Billy June and the Private Document" "Billy June and the Man Going Out."

THIS story properly begins with a conversation I had with Billy June almost a year ago now, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. We were having dinner together at the *Sociedade de Engenharia*, where I was a member, being a sort of engineer.

Before cocktails were served Billy looked at me with those direct, drilling brown eyes of his.

"What's wrong, Doag?" he asked.

"Wrong?" I repeated. "With me?"

"Oh, no," Billy laughed with his slow drawl. "I was talking about the German Lutheran church in Quincy, Illinois."

"What makes you think that anything is wrong, Billy?" I hedged.

"You ordered Scotch straight, for one

thing, Eddie. Your coat hasn't been brushed for a week, and you haven't told me that Carmen de Barrosa is the most wonderful girl in the world. Oh, that's it, is it?"

I was the color of a lobster.

"What's what?"

Billy picked up his cocktail and sipped it thoughtfully.

"How's the work going on the *seca* project?" he asked.

I put down my glass so suddenly that I broke the stem.

"I'll tell you what the trouble is, Billy," I said hastily. "The old man has sent me packing."

June raised his hand warningly.

"There, there, now, Eddie, don't let's get heated up over this thing. Take it slow and

easy and don't crowd so. What's the matter with old man de Barrosa?"

"He wants Carmen to marry Miguel Fuentes, in the first place. And he says that we men from the States are selfish, and money-mad—have no class. So he has told me to drop out."

"Going to, I suppose?"

I laughed.

"I guess you know me better than that, Billy," I said. "Do you think I would?"

"No," June said, "I don't. What does the most wonderful and the most beautiful and the most intelligent and the most enchanting girl in the world say, Eddie?"

"She's square."

"She'll hold a pat hand and wait for the old man to show—is that it?"

"That's about it."

"Good. And what are you going to do?"

I told him that I didn't know yet.

He pulled a paper from his pocket.

"I've got an idea, Eddie," he said in that provokingly slow way of his. "Here's an advertisement for men on the new *Amazonas e Goyaz* project, out in western Brazil. Why don't you take a run out there for a while, and let Senhor Oswaldo José de Barrosa think that the pot is his? Maybe you can fill your own hand in the meantime."

I eyed Billy keenly. He wasn't the sort to make suggestions idly, and yet it would be as easy to get information from an Amazon River Indian as from him.

"Are they dealing cards in this little game of mine that far out?" I asked finally.

Billy June balanced a piece of *omellete cuzida* on his fork and grinned mysteriously.

"Don't crowd me, now, Eddie," he ordered. "Don't hurry me into the ropes. I'm only suggesting, you understand."

I knew my Billy June. Besides, his idea seemed a good one. I was just as well out of the way for a time—something might happen to change Senhor de Barrosa's views regarding me and men from the States. And I knew that Carmen would stand with me to the end of the world. I took the paper Billy had drawn out.

"Where's the ad?" I asked abruptly.

"I'm going."

Billy looked at me aggrievedly.

"Doggone you, anyhow, Eddie Doag, if you aren't the most aggravating cuss for jumping at a man and rushing him off his feet! Here's the paper—you better finish your meal before you start."



THOSE who know Brazil are aware of the great stretch of rich territory beyond the western terminus of the Minas & Western Railroad that is unserved by a road. Several surveys had been planned, but none made, so far as I know, until a few months before the time of which I write, when a promoter named McAlpin blew in from the States and began talking of a road to the Amazon River and Peru.

He had brought letters from prominent States railroad men and financiers, was well received in Rio, and appeared to have unlimited capital behind him. His scheme found favor in Brazil, partly, as it happened, because of the great interest Senhor de Barrosa took in it.

De Barrosa was a *Deputado Federal*, who had been appointed many years before from somewhere near Goyaz, in the very heart of this western region I mention. He knew what the value of a railroad would be to his native state, and he had been instrumental, I had understood, in securing for McAlpin the promise of a government subsidy for the proposed *Goyaz e Amazonas*.

A week after Billy June made his suggestion to me I was in Goyaz, reporting at the offices of the *Compania Progressivo de Brazile Oeste* (Western Brazil Development Company), the construction and holding corporation of the railroad project. I was referred to a young clerk named Porter, a fellow who had formerly been employed in the *Departamento de Interior*.

"Hello, Porter," I said; "I've come up to look for a place on the line. Who will I see?"

Porter was flustered.

"See me, Mr. Doag," he said.

"You? But I'm not joking. I want to talk to the big boss, or the chief engineer or somebody. I've left the 'seca' project."

Porter nodded.

"I understand," he said. "And I'm telling you the truth. I'm—er—hiring and firing."

"What in blazes is your official title, then?" I asked. "Are you an engineer?"

"No," he said. "And I'm not a railroad man. But Mr. McAlpin has turned the office over to me. He's in Rio a good deal, and down at Minas, and I'm here all the time. That's how it is, you see."

"Who's chief engineer?"

"Why—er—we haven't one, yet. Bridges ran the preliminary survey."

"Fine and dandy," I said. "Then I'm elected. I'll be your chief engineer."

Porter was uncomfortable, but that wasn't surprising, inasmuch as he had run errands for me when I was in the engineer's office in the Interior Department.

"Can you come back tomorrow morning, Mr. Doag?" he asked a little anxiously. "I'll take it up with Mr. McAlpin this evening and let you know."

"I can come any time," I said. "And don't boost my game with your boss. If you can put me on in the engineering department I won't insist on being chief."

I wasn't made chief, but of course I hadn't expected to be. The next morning Porter said that Mr. McAlpin wanted to see me and I went into his private office. He was a large, red-faced man, in white flannels and an air of permanent prosperity.

"You're Doag, eh?" he began abruptly.

"Yes."

"Been in South America long?"

"Ten years."

"Where you from?"

"The States—California."

"What do you know about engineering?"

That was a poser.

"Not all there is to know," I said, laughingly. "I have some letters——"

He interrupted me with a wave of his hand.

"Don't want to see 'em," he said in his large, important way. "I've told Porter to put you on."

I went out, wondering why I had been called in. My guess now, in view of what I learned later, is that the promoter wanted to get a look at me. At any rate I reported to Porter, and he told me the big boss had said I was to go out on a reconnaissance survey over a route that Bridges hadn't seen.

On an old map of the district Porter indicated where Bridges had run his line and, roughly, where I was expected to go. The two routes were one for a few miles, then they separated and mine paralleled Bridges' twenty to forty miles south.

While I was finishing my talk with Porter two men came in with suit-cases and a great coat of sea-tan each, and asked for the chief engineer. They were States engineers, it developed, and each of them had an advertisement clipped from an American engineer-

ing journal, that ran, as I learned later, about this way:

WANTED: For railroad construction work in South America entire force: 10 civil engineers, 20 grading contractors, 20 railroad steel men, 10 bridge erectors, 30 carpenters, foremen, section bosses, and so on. Apply Western Brazil Development Company, Goyaz, Brazil.

They introduced themselves and I went out, leaving them talking with Porter. And that evening one of them, a fellow named Bogart Jones, came to my room in the hotel and said that he had been detailed to accompany me on my reconnaissance.

"You hooked on quickly, Mr. Jones," I said, after we'd exchanged experiences for a few minutes.

"I had to," he said. "Work is slack in the States. But that hundred-dollar deposit pretty nearly stopped me."

"Deposit?" I asked.

He looked at me.

"Maybe I shouldn't say anything."

"Shoot," I said. "I only went on today."

"Well," he said, "this chap Porter asked us half a dozen questions and looked at our letters and papers. Then he put us both on. The other fellow is a surveyor from Illinois. Porter shoved a blank at us—an application—and told us we would have to put up a hundred apiece deposit."

"Deposit for what, Jones—that you'll keep the peace?"

"Porter said it was to make sure that we'd stay on the job. He explained that the big boss doesn't want to put a lot of men on who will be sick of South America in a week and will leave him in the lurch."

"Did you deposit?" I asked.

"I deposited. I tell you I needed the job."

"But if this guy McAlpin wanted to keep men on the project why didn't he hire South Americans? I don't get it. And furthermore, I don't understand—" But I stopped there. "Oh, well, it's all in the day's work," I said. "Let's have a drink."

That night I sat down and wrote Billy June a letter. "I'm here—in the crazy house," I said, among other things. "Your friend, McAlpin, is holding up applicants for jobs for a hundred-dollar deposit each. He has, I find out, about a hundred and fifty of them—mostly from the States. He hasn't turned a spadeful of earth nor bought a pound of steel, and now he's starting me out on a reconnaissance—he hasn't even

a route determined. What's the answer?"

I took Jones and a couple of roustabouts on to the job the next morning. A week later, at a little telegraph station eighty miles west of Goyaz I got this wire:

McAlpin no friend of mine. Find your own answer. BILLY JUNE.

Then I knew that there was something afoot.

 JONES and I were gone five weeks. We had located a good, workable route, with a minimum of grades and everything easy, and with a fine lot of road-bed rock right at hand all the way. We would have figured out some interesting details with a few days more, but I was out of money and my telegrams to the Goyaz office hadn't brought me anything. So we started in—and learned something.

It was at a small town eight miles from Goyaz on Bridges' proposed route, which we were following back out of curiosity. We rode into this town—which I am not going to name for several reasons—and the first man I saw was Senhor Joao Mesantes, a son-in-law of Senhor de Barrosa—he had married Momisa, Carmen's oldest sister.

I was glad to see any familiar face after these weeks in the wilds, but particularly glad to hear direct from the lady in Rio de Janeiro who was of more interest to me than all the railroads in Christendom. So, when Senhor Mesantes invited us to stay the night with him on his ranch, Casas Verdes, we accepted with thanks.

We were taken out to the Mesantes home in an automobile—the first one we'd seen for a month—and treated royally. Afterward, in the grateful coolness of the evening, we three sat down to talk, and almost immediately Senhor Mesantes asked me if I had heard of the *Goyaz e Amazonas* project. I told him that I had.

"It will be a great thing for this territory in western Brazil," he said, speaking in English for the benefit of Jones. "Only last week I gave the Senhor Mister MagAlpeen a right-of-way across the de Barrosa land and my own, and a—what do you call—a bonice?"

"A bonús?" I said. It made me think of McAlpin's "deposit" from applicants for work. "How much was it?"

"In American gold about twelve thousand dollars," Senhor Mesantes answered. "That is because it will be of such a great value to us."

I nodded.

"It will help," I said. "But isn't that pretty steep?"

"Steep?" our host asked, puzzling.

So I translated it into Portuguese and it excited him so that he replied in the language of Brazil, explaining at some length that this project would mean the reclamation of the western states of the republic. Also, he said, there was to be a station on his land, within half a mile of the house.

I began to be interested, though not in the development of the land lying along the Goyaz and Amazon.

"Have your neighbors put up money—bonuses?" I asked.

"Certainly."

"As much, each, as you did?"

"About the same ratio."

"Then the landowners along the line have paid over to the company a good proportion of the amount it will cost to build the road," I said.

Our host shrugged.

"Of that we do not know. We need the railroad. And besides, the Government of Brazil is behind it."

I went to my room finally with a whirling head. McAlpin had hired me, without asking me for a deposit. He had immediately sent me out on a reconnaissance. But evidently, from what I had heard, he had determined previously on his route, for he was securing rights-of-way.

Why had he sent me out to make a survey for a route, then? If it was only to get rid of me why had he hired me? Apparently he wanted me around, either to keep me from investigating, or else because he thought my acquaintance in Brazil would be worth something to him. I remembered now the interest Senhor de Barrosa, father of Carmen, and a *Deputado Federal*, had taken in the *Goyaz e Amazonas* project. If there was anything wrong with McAlpin, Senhor de Barrosa would never have taken part in his scheme.

I recalled that considerable stock in the Western Brazil Development Company, McAlpin's construction corporation, had been sold around Rio, and that Senhor de Barrosa's name had been used as a guarantee of the soundness of the project.

All the way into Goyaz I kept mulling the matter over. If there was crookedness on, then secrecy was my best game. I made up my mind to wire for Billy June, asking

him to come up at once. If there was any one who could straighten out a tangle, he could.

The telegram I sent June was not the one I planned, after all, for when we reached Goyaz we found it afire with excitement.

OUR first hint of trouble came at Mandana, a settlement just at the edge of Goyaz. There was a sort of half-way construction camp there, and some dirt had been moved. A fellow named Kimbel, the man who had come down from the States with Bogart Jones, was in charge of this camp, and it was from him we got the story.

"The men have struck—we've all struck," he announced, when we met him. "The road is tied up tighter than a New England charity association."

"Higher wages, or shorter hours?" I asked jokingly.

"Any wages at all," said Kimbel.

"What do you mean?"

"There hasn't been a pay-day in more than two months—almost three," Kimbel said.

"Does that include you?" I asked. "Jones and I have one month's envelope coming to us."

"It includes every one, I guess, unless it's the office force," Kimbel replied. "The men stayed by McAlpin up to the last few days because he explained that his money was late in arriving from the States. That might have been true—probably was. And a lot of us had a hundred dollar cash deposit up, so we couldn't afford to quit. With the laborers—about two hundred of them—it was different. They're in the mood now to hang McAlpin, and he hasn't shown his face in Goyaz since Friday."

This was news that made me incline an ear. I was tired and dirty and not particularly anxious to go to the offices that night, but the mess was getting a little thick. I turned to Jones.

"I'm going to report tonight," I said. "Want to go?"

"What good will that do us?" he inquired. "If we can make this promoter pay us tonight we can do it just as well tomorrow, can't we?"

"I don't think he plans to pay anybody," I blurted. "I'm going in to see what's happening."

"That's different," Jones said promptly. "I'm with you."

"And me, too," Kimbel struck in.

Poor Kimbel! I have often wondered since what would have happened if he hadn't volunteered. But he did, and we hurried on.

It was ten o'clock when we reached the company's offices. Along the street we saw the railroad hands, in groups of threes or fours or a dozen, talking quietly, but with faces and voices that showed that they were surly and dissatisfied. As we rode nearer to the offices we began to come on the Americans, and I was surprised to see how many of them there were. I hailed a young chainman whom I knew and asked him why the men were out so late.

"McAlpin is expected tonight," he answered.

"With the pay-rolls?" I asked.

"I don't know—none of us knows. Porter, in the office, says that he thinks our money is coming up. He's a good guy. But that little sneak Arnowitz—"

"Who's he?"

"McAlpin's secretary. And if ever there was a crook made, then Arnowitz is crooked. I've heard that he made a pile on the side out of the rights-of-way."

"How's that?"

"He's the man who went out and signed the landowners up."

"How far did he go—west I mean?"

"I don't know," Evans replied. "To the Peru line, I suppose. They say he cleaned up the whole line for the road, clear to the river, and that he didn't pay a cent for it."

I grinned, remembering what Senhor Mesantes had told me of McAlpin's benevolent *bonice* scheme.

"I guess that part of it is true enough," I said. "But what about this man Arnowitz?"

"He takes the high and lofty position that we are all mere dogs of laborers and that we should be grateful to his god, McAlpin, that we are allowed to live. When some of the boys began to talk rough, Arnowitz hired half a dozen hard nuts to stay with him in the office to protect the railroad's property. They are there now—armed like a bunch of Villista brigands."

"That makes it nice," I said. "I'm going to the office and take a look at the Arnowitz army. Who's coming along?"

The three boys were game. They

chorused their answer—they would stand with me. So we proceeded on our way.

Of course I had no intention of making a row. If I had known anything of what was ahead of me, I might have deferred the excursion until morning. We were going to make an investigation in the most direct way, perhaps in a way that wasn't precisely legal and orderly, but we were all of us mad, and I, for one, having Billy June in mind, was curious.

So the four of us walked on to the door of the office. We found it locked. I hammered on it, and Charley Porter answered.

"What's up?" he asked, and I saw that he was worried and pale.

"Hello, Porter," I said. "Jones and I have just gotten back from the river and we wanted to leave our field notes and sketches here."

Porter hesitated. Then he leaned nearer me.

"I've got orders to keep everybody out, Mr. Doag," he whispered. "But things don't look right. When I leave the door you can walk in if you want to."

"That's fair enough, Porter," I said. "Vamoose!"

He closed the door, but in a moment was back.

"Are you boys armed?" he asked in a melodramatic whisper.

I laughed aloud.

"Good Lord, no!" I said. "What do you think we are, vigilantes?"

He shook his head.

"I ought to warn you that you're taking a chance."

"Thanks, Porter," I said. "Go on in—and leave the door unlocked."

He hurried away, and after I'd given him a minute, I jerked my head for the three boys behind me and we went in as carelessly as if to supper.

We were in the big outer office, from which were the doors leading to Porter's room, McAlpin's office, and a long, narrow drafting-room on the north side. It occurred to me then that I had better leave Kimbel and Roberts in this place and go on with Jones alone, since we were ostensibly there to report. This I did, and walked boldly up to McAlpin's door.

At my rap there was a sudden lull of the conversation inside.

"Who's there?" I heard; and it was the voice of the big promoter himself.

"Ah, so you're back, are you?" I thought to myself, and aloud I said: "Doag and Jones, Mr. McAlpin. We're just in from the line."

There was a moment's delay, and I thought I heard whispers; then the door opened. McAlpin was sitting at his desk, much as he had been on the day I first met him. His feet were on a table and in his lips was a long, black Honduras cigar. The man who had opened the door was an oily little fellow—Arnowitz, as I guessed—and in the shadows of one corner were three roughly dressed citizens, two of whom were obviously from the States, and one of whom was a Brazilian ruffian.

I nodded to McAlpin and faced him, across the table.

"We've found a good line," I reported briefly. "It will take me about ten days to make a report and the sketch maps I've planned."

McAlpin answered heartily.

"Good work, Mr. Doag," he said. "I knew you were the man I was looking for. Finish that job and then come in and see me. I've got a proposition to make to you."

"Thanks," I said, "but I have a couple of questions to ask first."

McAlpin coolly flicked the ash from his cigar.

"Well?"

"Jones and I are out of funds, Mr. McAlpin. We had to cut our work in the field short because we couldn't get any answer to our telegrams. Now we're back and we would like to draw last month's envelope tonight, if it's convenient."

McAlpin turned to his clerk.

"Get the checks for Jones and Mr. Doag, will you, Arnowitz?" he said immediately. "Now, Doag, what's your other question?"

He had taken the wind out of my sails by his promptness on the pay proposition, and I hesitated. I hadn't expected this sort of answer.

"Well, Mr. McAlpin," I said, when I had caught my breath, "the other question was this: I went out on reconnaissance, to look for a route for the road, and now you say you want a report from me on what we found. But meantime I understand that you have already secured a right-of-way over Bridges' line."

McAlpin smiled, and Arnowitz came up then with our checks, which he shoved

across to us. We signed for them, and the promotor said, still smiling—

"What is there about all this that seems wrong to you, Doag?"

I stammered a little.

"Why, to tell the truth, it doesn't seem regular, exactly, to run a survey that you aren't going to use."

"Oh, that's it, eh?" he asked easily.

"Well, don't worry about that—we may use your line yet. While we were sitting around here waiting for you, though, I thought we'd get the right-of-way over Bridges' survey. It is none of your business, to tell the truth, but I'm explaining it to you because I want you on the inside."

I glanced meaningly across the room to where the three rough-necks sat in one corner. McAlpin caught my glance and flushed a little.

"You'll have to excuse me now, Doag," he said, abruptly and somewhat testily. "I'll see you later. I'm very busy. Good night."

Jones and I went out in a hurry. Arnowitz slammed the door after us and I heard the lock click. Curiosity got the better of me again, and I paused, listening. I was rewarded.

"Where's Porter, Arnowitz?" McAlpin boomed angrily. "What in blazes did he let that pair in here for? You go out and kick him off the place—I don't trust him any longer."

It was risky to wait, but I wanted to get more if I could. Arnowitz answered from where he stood beyond the door, and I could hear him plainly.

"I don't trust anybody, Joe," he said excitedly. "If we're going, we better go now. That fellow Doag is too smart, I tell you!"

McAlpin swore.

"I can't go until these papers are out of the way, Arnowitz. You run along and get rid of Porter."

I thought we were trapped, now, but instead heard the sound of the secretary's steps crossing the inner room. Instantly I sprang at Jones.

"Don't make a sound," I jerked. "I'm going to leave Kimbel and Roberts in here."

Jones tiptoed out and I crossed to the other pair.

"There's something big on," I whispered. "I want to go to send a telegram and get a gun, and I want you to stay and open the door for us when we come back. Will you?"

Kimbel nodded.

"You know it. Where will we stay?"

I looked around and saw a map locker just inside the swinging-door at the counter.

"Get in there," I said. "You're taking a chance—but I don't think either of those crooks are thinking about maps tonight. They're preparing to make a getaway."

The two boys nodded and stepped into the map cupboard. I went out the front door with Jones, and once there I made him hurry.

"Go to the mercantile company's office and see if our checks are good," I said. "I think they're worthless. I'm going to send a wire to a friend of mine in Rio, and I'm going to get a secret service man that I know. We've got to protect the boys that are waiting for their pay-checks, or they won't get anything. See?"

Jones nodded and slapped me on the back.

"I'm with you," he said, and ran down the street.

On my way to the telegraph-office I saw that the employees were gathering in one big group, and for a moment I thought of telling them my story and arranging a coup for the benefit of McAlpin. But that would mean a general alarm, and probably mob violence.

From the looks of McAlpin's staff there would be some one hurt, and, as I had until midnight to figure a scheme to keep McAlpin and his secretary from escaping, if that was their plan, I decided to go it alone. So I hurried on to the telegraph-office.

I wrote a hasty wire to Billy June, in English, to avoid its being read at my end, and handed it to the clerk. He glanced at the signature.

"We have a wire for you, Senhor Doag," he said.

It was in my hands in a moment and I ripped it open. It was from Carmen, and read:

Can you come immediately. Father in trouble—arrested.

I stopped, staring at the message.

"What time does the morning train leave?" I asked.

The clerk answered over his shoulder.

"Seven-thirty."

I seized two blanks and wrote hastily:

BILLY JUNE, *Hotel Avenida, Rio de Janeiro:*

If you can be of assistance to Senhorita Carmen de Barrosa please act for me. I leave for Rio tomorrow morning.

EDMUND DOAG.

Then I took the other blank and wrote:

SENORITA CARMEN DE BARROSA, *Rio de Janeiro*:

Am writing Billy June. Will be in Rio Wednesday. Don't worry about your father. It's probably politics.

As I turned to the clerk he raised his hand.

"Wait," he said. "I'm taking a message for you now."

This was coming pretty fast. I waited impatiently. Presently the operator signaled his O. K. of the telegram and wrote it out for me. It read:

DOAG, Goyaz: I must see McAlpin tonight. Depend on you. JUNE.

I frowned and read the message again.

"Tonight," I mused. "'Depend on you.' That means that I'm to hold him. But how can June get here——"

"Where was this message put on the wire?" I snapped.

The operator glanced at it.

"Oh, I forgot that. It comes from Sitio."

That explained it all. Billy June was on the way up and would be in Goyaz on the midnight train. I changed my message to Carmen de Barrosa, threw down a gold piece and ran.



WITH a secret service man at my side and a good automatic in my pocket I was inside the company's offices again in fifteen minutes. It was after eleven o'clock. We stood a minute by the door listening. I heard the sound made by tearing papers and furniture hastily moved. Kimbel and Roberts whispered to me.

"They seem to be packing up. The secretary has been in here several times and carted out papers."

My secret service friend was calmly smoking a cigaret.

"Is there another door to Senhor McAlpin's office?" he asked.

Roberts answered—

"Yes—one going into the drafting-room—another into a lobby that leads out the rear of the building."

The official nodded.

"These two men should go to the rear," he said to me.

He held a revolver out and Kimbel took it promptly and dropped it into his coat pocket. The two went out, and as they did so, Bogart Jones appeared, panting.

"The checks were refused," he said, and I nodded.

"Have you a gun?" I asked him.

He showed me the butt of a navy revolver.

The police official pointed.

"Will you go into that drafting-room, Senhor?"

Jones nodded and tiptoed away. Then, to me, the officer said:

"I will remain here. If any trouble is made, you call."

To give Roberts and Kimbel time to reach their station I waited a full minute, then I loosened the buttons of my coat and walked to McAlpin's door. But even as I raised my hand to knock, there came from the rear of the building a sudden outcry, the reports of two revolver shots, and a scream of agony.

I dropped my hand to my revolver and tried the door, but it was locked. Instantly I drew back and hit the heavy paneling with my shoulder and the door gave, sending me sprawling into the room. I was on my feet at once, the secret service man behind me. Across the desk from us stood Arnowitz, his face green-gray, his mouth working.

"What do you want?" he stammered. "Get out of here!"

I whipped open the door leading to the drafting-room, and Jones ran in.

"Watch that rat," I called to him, and plunged on through a rear exit after the police official.

We were in a narrow corridor—between us and the vague light of night that shone through the door at the far end, were two men. My police friend dropped to one knee and I followed his example. We were in a darkness blacker than that surrounding the two beyond. But they wheeled and fired at us.

Both of us let go—I with two shots, the secret service man with one—and we charged. The two men in the corridor fell. There was no time to see who they were, for in the distance we could hear cries and the galloping hoof-beats of horses, and on the threshold of the rear door lay poor Kimbel, shot through the body. Roberts was gone, but I heard his voice, shouting:

"Stop thief! This way! Help!"

We ran on, down a side street and out into the poorer part of town. Half a dozen horses were tied in front of a saloon,

their owners were just tumbling forth to see what was going on. What they saw was myself and the police officer mounting the first of the animals that we could reach and dashing off into the night.

McAlpin had escaped. He was somewhere on ahead. What had happened at the back door of the office was only conjecture, but it was plain that part of Arnowitz's armed force of ruffians had been covering the promoter's retreat and that Kimbel had arrived just in time, after leaving us, to attempt, single-handed, to prevent it.

We might catch McAlpin and we might not. Jones would hold Arnowitz, but there was small satisfaction to me in that. No, I had manifestly blundered the thing. I could see now that the safe play for me would have been to spread the news of McAlpin's contemplated departure among the men at Goyaz. But I had been too sure of myself.

The secret service man and myself had not ridden far when we heard the sounds of hoofs from behind. We slowed up for a moment, and presently were overtaken by Roberts, two or three of the railroad's staff, and several Brazilians, keen for excitement. We explained in a few words, and then I sent Roberts back to telegraph ahead to Senhor Mesantes at Mandana and prepare a reception committee for McAlpin. That seemed all I could do to retrieve myself, and so, when he had gone, we hurried forward, as fast as our horses could travel.

To make this part of the story short, we failed. When we reached Mandana, Senhor Mesantes and his men held captive one of the gunmen I had seen at McAlpin's office, but no efforts on our part were successful in forcing him to tell what had happened to the promoter.

"I don't understand," was the best answer we could get.

We turned the man over to the local police, got fresh horses, and prepared to start back.

But before I was ready I took Senhor Mesantes aside.

"Do you know anything of the difficulty of Senhor de Barrosa in Rio?" I asked.

He started.

"How did you hear?" he asked.

"His daughter wired me."

"Oh! So you are the friend of my sister-in-law, eh?" he asked.

I fidgeted.

"Yes. Tell me what is wrong down there."

Senhor Mesantes frowned.

"He is charged with drawing two hundred *contas of reis* (sixty thousand dollars) from Government funds for which he is unable to account."

I gasped.

"Embezzlement?" I asked.

"That is the accusation."

"Do you believe it is true?"

Senhor Mesantes shrugged and smiled.

"The *Senhor Deputado Federal* de Barrosa would not steal one tiny *rei* piece. But that he took this amount and can not account for it to the satisfaction of the *Tribunal de Finance*—that may be true."

All in a heap I was struck by an idea.

"By the Lord Harry! I know where that sixty thousand is!" I cried. "I've got the whole thing. I'll let you hear in the morning, senhor—and don't worry. *Adios!*"

As I loped steadily back with the others toward Goyaz I went over the business in my head and became more and more convinced of the correctness of my theory. Senhor de Barrosa had been the government apostle of the McAlpin project. The Brazilian Department of Finance doesn't advance subsidy money until the promoters have spent enough to show good faith.

McAlpin, who had made only a scant beginning in his railroad enterprise, had wheedled Senhor de Barrosa into getting him the cash out of the treasury. It was with this, in addition to money he had received from landowners and the sales of stock, that he was going to leave Brazil. The whole thing hitched up. But where was McAlpin?

I dropped my heels vigorously into the ribs of my new pony and led the procession into Goyaz. If Senhor de Barrosa was to be cleared, McAlpin and the money must be produced, and I made up my mind that I would produce them, if the pursuit took me to the interior of China.



IT WAS after midnight when we reached the company's offices. I was dog-tired, having been on the move since sunup the day before; but I forgot all this now. The office building was lighted, but the heavy paper shades were all drawn. And surrounding the whole building were the railroad hands,

five or six deep, waiting impatiently for some development.

Capito Andrade, the police officer, left me to start a state-wide search by telegraph for the missing promoter. I pushed through the line of watchers and, from the front entrance, told them that we had lost the trail of McAlpin but that the police would certainly have him before morning. I didn't feel all the confidence I put into my words, and from some jeering and angry remarks from the crowd I saw that there were others in the same fix. But I had done all I could.

Anxious to get an interview with Arnowitz, so that I could have everything ready on Billy June's arrival, I knocked at the door, was admitted by Porter, who had gotten back into the game during my absence, and faced—Billy June himself.

"Hello, Eddie," he said as calmly as if we were meeting for a game of billiards at the *Sociedad*. "Didn't have much luck, did you?"

I gripped his hand.

"No, Billy," I said somewhat guiltily, "I'm afraid I've bungled the thing. McAlpin got away."

Billy June relighted a brown-paper cigaret slowly. "Oh, now, Doag," he protested with his infernal drawl; "I wouldn't say that. There's more than one route around a stump!"

"Oh, I'm hoping, Billy," I said promptly. "There's a chance yet. The police of all western Brazil are being stirred up by wire and runners now, and we'll make it warm for the gentleman. What I want to know is—can we hold him on a charge if we get him?"

Billy grinned.

"There you go, Eddie, tearing into the thing like the house was on fire, instead of taking it easy. Just hold your horses a minute and don't get all sweaty about it. I was going to suggest something."

"Shoot," I said, with a grin; there was no sense in trying to hurry June, as I well knew.

"All right," he said. "I wish you'd go out and organize the gang outside, will you? Tell 'em to stay on the job. Arnowitz—don't you think he's a nice, interesting, agreeable little fellow, Eddie? Well, Arnowitz might make a break or something. And he's a slippery eel."

"He'd better not slip out into their hands

in their present frame of mind," I said heartily.

"Exactly," said Billy June. "That was what I was thinking of. Tell them to stick around awhile. Also, I wish you'd ask them to appoint a committee of three to come and listen to the—the obsequies."

"The which?"

"Let that go," Billy said, still grinning. "Ask them to send in three of the men they trust to join the party we're going to have."

"With Arnowitz?" I asked.

"With Arnowitz, yes."

I attended to the order in a rush. Inside of three or four minutes I was back in McAlpin's office, facing Arnowitz, two of his ruffianly guards, who had been disarmed and put in chairs, Bogart Jones, who was grinning, and Billy June, and behind me were Bridges, a bridge constructor named Forrester and a Brazilian engineer called Perez—the employees' committee. And in the corner where, two hours before, I had first seen Arnowitz's armed guards, sat Senhor Oswaldo José de Barrosa! I bowed to him and he responded, but he was not thinking of me.

Billy June took the floor. He turned to the committee.

"I asked Mr. Doag to invite you folks in," he began, in his leisurely fashion, "because I wanted you to understand how this thing has come up. You want your money, and I want to see you get it. You don't know me, but it won't matter, I guess, if you get your pay envelopes."

The three men grinned and nodded.

"All right, then." He fingered his collar and blew out a big cloud of cigaret smoke. "Strikes me it's kind of crowded in here," he said quizzically. "Let's get somewhere where there's room."

He led the way to the long, narrow drafting-room, with its work-tables, litter of papers and maps, roll-lockers and instrument closets, and hitched himself onto a desk. Then for the first time I saw that Roberts, the man who had gone to the back door with Kimbel when that poor lad was killed was sitting now on a low bench under a window, with a revolver in each hand. I had no chance to speak to him nor to make out what he was doing there before Billy June began to speak.

"Mr. Jones," he said pleasantly, as an opening: "I wish you'd bring your

slippery friend Arnowitz up here where we can hear him talk."

Jones, with more roughness than may have been absolutely necessary, dragged the cringing clerk nearer.

"Fine," said June. "Now, Mr. Private Secretary, I want you to tell these gentlemen where you were going tonight, at midnight, or thereabouts."

Arnowitz glanced about the room like a rat caught in a trap.

"I haven't anything to say," he said.

June turned to Bridges, of the committee.

"This sneaking little ferret is a pal of the promoter, McAlpin. They're both crooks. The boys tell me that McAlpin got away. But Arnowitz has got enough money on him, if I'm any guesser, to settle the pay-rolls. What do you suppose the boys waiting outside would give to get their hands on him?"

Bridges started forward.

"You don't need to turn him over to the boys outside," he said menacingly. "I'll take care of him, Mr. June."

Arnowitz put up his hands.

"Don't you hit me, Bridges!" he cried hoarsely. "I've got some rights."

"Oh, yes," Billy June interrupted pleasantly; "you've got some, but not the kind we'll recognize. Will you answer some questions?"

Arnowitz moistened his lips and looked about him once more. He caught the gaze of the company men on him, and he shivered.

"Yes," he said. "What is it?"

Billy June smiled.

"That's better. Just follow me a minute, will you? About seven months ago the Brazilian Government asked me, on the quiet, to find out anything I could about a promoter named McAlpin, who had drifted in from the States. I spent a few dollars in telegraph tolls and found out that he and another man were wanted in Oregon, in the States, for some sort of grafting. That other man's name was Levisohn, *alias* Arnowitz."

The little secretary paled, but said nothing, and Billy June continued his story:

"I found out that it would be slow business extraditing these two to Oregon, and I knew that if we gave them room enough they'd contrive to build themselves a trap here in Brazil and fall into it: So I kept a sort of eye on them.

"A friend of mine wanted to leave Rio

Janeiro, for certain reasons, about two months ago, and I recommended to him that he come up and get a job on this railroad that my two crooks were out here pretending to build. I knew I could trust Mr. Doag to find out things for himself, and he did. He, and he alone, turned up the whole rotten scheme. He's the man who's responsible for getting this rat Arnowitz where we could put the screws on him."

Billy June turned suddenly to old Senhor de Barrosa, who, for the moment, I had forgotten. In Portuguese Billy said to him:

"Senhor, Mr. Doag is the man who has made it possible for me to clear your name in your present trouble with the Government. Thank him, then."

The old senhor looked at me and nodded, and I thought there were tears in his eyes. It had been an awful strain on him, as I could well understand. But there was no opportunity for our affair then.

Billy June was gimletting Arnowitz again.

"The Government, Mr. Levisohn, or whatever your right name is, promised Mr. McAlpin a subsidy to help him with his road. A week or so ago he persuaded the senhor to obtain part of that subsidy for him. He had forged documents to show, and Senhor de Barrosa took sixty thousand dollars and turned it over to you."

"That's not right," Arnowitz burst out. "McAlpin had that money."

"Oh, he got it later, all right," June answered. "I know that. But you took it first. You're guilty on that count. Also you're guilty of falsifying deeds secured by you for railroad rights-of-way. Also you're guilty of mortgaging property belonging to the railroad, and taking the money yourself. Also you're guilty of appropriating about forty thousand dollars that came from stock sales in your fake railroad scheme. Also——"

Arnowitz was like a dead man. Suddenly he staggered forward and held out his hands in a violent gesture of dissent.

"Some of that is right, Mr. June," he cried. "Some of it. But I wasn't the head of the scheme. I had nothing to do with it, except as McAlpin's secretary. He planned it all and I was only working for him. I swear to you that I didn't know anything more about this, until tonight, than you did! It isn't right to lay it on me—McAlpin's the man. He's got the money——"

I was leaning against a door, near where Roberts sat, still with his two guns in his hands, and at this moment I jumped from him as if I had been perforated by a bullet from one of his revolvers. For from the closet behind me came an angry bellow—

"You lie!"

I swung around to face that mysterious door; for I knew that voice.

Billy June suddenly burst into a roar of laughter.

"All right, Roberts," he said, and the latter sprang forward, turned the key, opened the door, and from that cupboard walked Mr. Joseph Patton McAlpin, late president and general manager of the *Goyaz e Amazonas Railroad Company*.

The big promotor did not hesitate when he was in the room. He blinked once, or twice to accustom his eyes to the light, then he made a pounce for Arnowitz. I think he was angry enough to have killed the little clerk, but we pulled them apart.

"There you go, McAlpin," Billy June's slow voice boomed, when we had restored quiet. "There you are, pretty nearly spoiling the picture in your mad haste. Now, wait a minute."

He dragged himself to his feet and stood close to McAlpin, boring him with his wise brown eyes.

"Outside, Mr. Promoter and States crook, there is a hungry mob of men who have been working for you. They would be extremely happy to string you to a tall pole and leave you there till the birds picked the carrion from your dirty carcass. Will you go out there—or will you give me the sight drafts that Senhor de Barrosa's good friend of the Bank of South America informs us you bought four days ago? Which will it be—cough up or swing up?"

McAlpin attempted a feeble grin.

"I guess you've got a betting hand, Mr. June," he said with what he intended for pleasantry of manner. "I lose. But I'd

like to ask you one question first."

"Well?"

"When I started away from here after being routed up by your smart young man, Doag, there, I found his men with their guns at the back door. I sent one of our guards on out to start a false trail, and I came back and hid here. Later I heard the door locked. What I want to know is, how did you find me?"

Billy June raised his voice and his eyes were hard.

"I'll tell you how, and may a brave boy's death be on your head! As you came back through the hall, you stepped in the blood from the body of Doag's man Kimbel. You killed him—you and your gang—but he helped us run you down for it. Look on the floor!"

He looked, did that terrified and conscience-stricken crook, and we all looked. And there, plainly, between the door into the corridor and the spot where the guilty man had hidden, were footprints marked in blood.

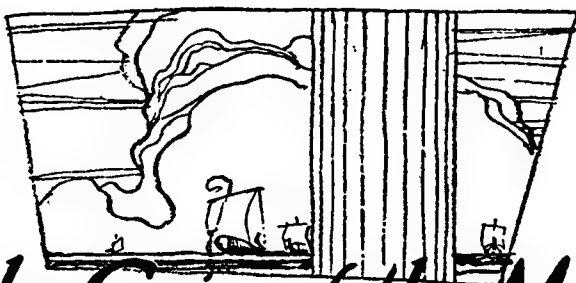
McAlpin shivered. Then he reached into his pocket and drew out a leather case. Billy June took it, coolly, slipped off the rubber band, and shook onto the table fourteen sight drafts, payable to bearer, of twenty-five thousand dollars each.

He held them up.

"Three hundred and fifty thousand dollars of Brazilian capital here," he said quietly, drawlingly. "I guess we'll keep it in South America, where it belongs, and put our two slick friends into the place where they belong. Take 'em over to the jail, boys."

As I stepped back to make room for the volunteers who had seized McAlpin and the half-dead Arnowitz, I found myself facing Senhor de Barrosa.

"I shall be glad to see you in Rio, senhor, at my home," he said; and we shook hands.



In the Grip of the Minotaur

A Four-part Story-Conclusion

by Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

AT THE dawn of civilization, long before the rise of Greece, King Minos of Crete, by virtue of his great fleet, ruled the Mediterranean world. He drew tribute from many cities, one of which was Troy, ruled by old King Dardanus whose beautiful daughter, Ilia, was desired by Prince Ambrogeos of Crete.

From out of the North came a strange wolf-prowed ship to Troy. It carried Ragnarr, a Norse prince, Valgard, his right-hand warrior, and two score giant Northmen. They first visited Troy Fair, where Ragnarr rescued from drunken lumbermen, Rala, a pretty little acrobat, who straightway attached herself to him as a life-servant.

Ragnarr was then entertained by King Dardanus. He met Ilia and each loved the other almost from that moment. Meanwhile Ragnarr learned from Dardanus that King Minos of Crete was crushing tribute from Troy.

Dardanus needed ships which Ragnarr's men could build and arms which the Pharaoh of Egypt alone could furnish. Dardanus promised Ilia to Ragnarr if the Norse prince would bring arms from Egypt and help overthrow Minos. Ragnarr agreed, and on the eve of his departure he gave Rala to Ilia as a maid.

That same day a Cretan galley landed at Troy, bringing Admiral Rhodonthos and Prince Ambrogeos, come to claim Ilia. The Northmen defeated the Cretans in a street brawl. Ambrogeos swore to bring Ragnarr to account for presuming to be the equal of the Prince of Crete.

Then Ambrogeos demanded Ilia from Dardanus. Ilia hated Ambrogeos. But when she learned that the price of her refusal would be the overthrow of her father's kingdom she sadly consented to their marriage.

She was to remain in Troy until the return of Ambrogeos from Egypt, where he expected to form a pact between his father and Pharaoh by marrying the Egyptian princess, promising Dardanus, however, that Ilia would take precedence over the daughter of Pharaoh.

Ragnarr learned from Rala of the perfidy of weak old Dardanus. The hour for Ilia's marriage was at hand. Through an underground passage the Norse prince led his Goths into the temple where Dardanus and his court had assembled for the marriage ceremony.

The Northmen broke into the great hall. Ragnarr cut down Prince Ambrogeos, then defied Dardanus and all his guard, while Ilia went to his arms.

Dardanus was terrified. Admiral Rhodonthos told old Dardanus quickly what the vengeance of Minos would be, then the body of Ambrogeos was borne away to the Cretan ship. Dardanus explained to Ragnarr that every year twenty youths and twenty maidens were levied from Troy by Minos to feed the Cretan Minotaur, a terrible monster that none ever met and returned to describe. Now Minos would demand a life from every household in Troy for the deed committed by Ragnarr.

Raising his sword Tyrning, the Norse prince swore by a great oath to sail to the island of Crete, give himself up to meet the

Minotaur and slay him in single combat. Then would he return to Troy and claim Ilia, his bride.

For he knew not that Valgard had already told Ilia that the *Gray Wolf* sailed at flood tide in two hours, and that Ilia had promised to come to a grove on the river's bank by the southwest gate and meet the ship.

Princess Ilia was caught by her father in her effort to escape, but Rala won through to the ship and with the Northmen sailed away for Crete. Arriving at the island, Ragnarr gained audience with Minos by using a proclamation of friendship, signed by King Dardanus before Ragnarr and he broke their compact.

Ragnarr found royal welcome in Knossos, the Cretan capital, for no word had yet come to Minos concerning his son's reception at Troy. In the days that passed Ragnarr entered into Cretan sports and met Princess Ariadne who soon became infatuated with this proud young giant from the Northland. And at his request she led him one night into the labyrinth where lived the Minotaur, that he might hear the monster's voice come booming up through those endless stone halls.

Meantime Prince Ambrogeos recovered consciousness at sea. Straightway, on learning how it chanced that he was thus sorely injured, he set back to Troy, and, going before Dardanus, demanded Ilia immediately. There was nothing the girl could do but consent. So Ambrogeos sailed away with her toward his homeland, swearing that on their wedding-day his enemy and her sweetheart, Ragnarr the Norseman, should die in the clutches of the Minotaur.

But ere Ambrogeos arrived at Knossos, Ragnarr, while hunting, by accident killed the sacred bull of Crete. His men were straightway imprisoned, and, according to the Cretan law, despite the pleas of Princess Ariadne, Ragnarr was condemned to fight a wild bull.

In the arena where such combats took place, there first came other contestants, among whom, to Ragnarr's astonishment, was Rala. And his blood boiled with rage as the girl was goaded to death before his eyes. Then Ragnarr's hour arrived. As the bull charged, he seized the brute's horns. Slowly, to the amazement of the Cretans, the strength and skill of the blond

giant won. The bull's neck snapped—broken. Then, just as Ragnarr was about to win his freedom, into the arena rushed Ambrogeos, just landed from Troy, who shouted out the story of Ragnarr's attack upon him, a prince of Crete, and of the Norsemen's contempt for Cretan power. He demanded that Ragnarr be thrown to the Minotaur.

Purple with rage, Minos ordered Ragnarr seized. Barehanded the Northern prince desperately fought off the Cretan soldiers. But at last an ax crashed down on his skull and night descended upon him.

Ragnarr regained consciousness in prison, and that same night Princess Ariadne helped him to escape. Through the labyrinth she led him for a second time, but now she disclosed to him the secret of the Minotaur. It was not a monster of flesh and blood which man could kill, but an image in bronze, fed with fire by priests from the temple.

Suddenly the two arrived before the door of the room wherein Ragnarr's men were imprisoned. And at that instant Ariadne bared her heart to him.

"Let us fly from this land, you and I, my prince," she begged.

But ere Ragnarr could tell her where his love lay, they were set upon by a guardsman whom the Norseman slew. Then, setting free his men, Ragnarr bade Ariadne a hasty farewell.

In a rush the Norse giants broke a way to their ship through the drowsing guard of the city. And shaking their fists in farewell to Knossos they turned the *Gray Wolf* toward Troy.

When the nose of their galley entered the straits which led to the Euxine Sea they were hailed by Kamas, officer of the Trojan coastguard who, instead of stopping them, joined their little band, and together they headed homeward.

Meanwhile Minos learned of Ragnarr's escape. He could not help suspecting his daughter of this treachery, yet of proof he had none.

Now was King Minos indeed aroused. Full well he knew that the Norse prince would keep his word and return with a mighty fleet to sweep the Cretan galleys from the sea and pillage fair Knossos. Crete had no army. So, seized by fear, Minos called together his civilian chiefs and

pointed out to them the gathering cloud in the north.

"Nonsense!" they replied. "Our navy rules the seas. We will swallow their galleys as a shark swallows a shad."

And so the Minoan plan for defense was defeated. Still Minos had one card left to play.

Egypt, having a great army, was weak on the sea. Therefore Minos despatched Ambrogeos to Pharaoh, offering to make an alliance with Egypt whereby Crete should furnish ships, Egypt men-at-arms, in case either should be attacked. And to strengthen the union Ambrogeos was to hasten his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter. Thus was Ilia again saved, for the time, by Minos' peril.

Far away, on the dark northern border of Europe, Ragnarr gathered a mighty host. Promises of loot, fabulous wealth, beautiful lands, and a chance to crush him who claimed to own the sea brought to Ragnarr's banner all the daring young chieftains of the Goths, the Swedes, the Norse. Then, Winter having passed, their sturdy ships plowed southward through uncharted seas toward that far-off, mysterious land of gold.

In Crete, where she awaited with dread the return of Ambrogeos, Ilia learned of Ragnarr's escape. All through the long Winter she prayed that he might live to keep his vow and return to her. She and Princess Ariadne had become firm friends, neither knowing the other's love for the tall Prince Ragnarr. But each suspected the truth.

All was not well with Ambrogeos in Egypt. The crafty Pharaoh dragged out negotiations for the treaty week after week, secretly waiting to see whether there did not exist a real peril for Crete, of which he knew nothing, and which, suddenly breaking upon the island, would lead Egypt into a profitless war.

At last, his fears at rest, Pharaoh consented to seal the agreement with Minos, when battle-scarred sailors brought word of a great sea-fight. The invincible western Cretan fleet was now underneath the waves, they said, and the barbarian Ragnarr, with hundreds of galleys, sweeping on through the Mediterranean toward Crete. Whereupon Pharaoh refused to sign the treaty, and Ambrogeos, furious, boasting, hurried to his ships.

Thus, pulling out of the Nile, the ver-

million prows of fivescore and ten Cretan galleys pointed seaward to meet the oncoming wolves of the sea and hold the water-road to Crete.

CHAPTER XXIII

ARIADNE ACTS

IT WAS the time of the harvest festival in Crete; and the great southern plain of Messara, the center of the island's agriculture, swarmed with dark-skinned workers. Never was the wheat so fine and abundant; to help harvest it, many seamen were sent inland from the ships which the Autumn storms had laid up in the yards at Palaikastro.

Looking down on the western end of the vast grain-field, Phæstos, the beautiful, crowned the spur of a hill that rose three hundred feet above the plain. Its limestone buildings gleamed one above another in four stately terraces, their flat roofs crested with fair-growing gardens. Each year the Princess Ariadne came to inquire into the stewardship of her chief estate—for she was hereditary Lady of Phæstos—and to honor its harvest festival.

During the long year and more that Ilia had been with her, their friendship had ripened into a deep affection. Never, since the momentous day when Ariadne discovered Ilia's love for Ragnarr, had either girl mentioned the matter to the other; and their common devotion, hopeless as it seemed to both, only made the bond between them closer. The two princesses were inseparable, and the harvest festival found them both at Phæstos.

It was early morning, scarce two hours after sunrise, and the ground-mists were swiftly vanishing in the heat. Ilia and Ariadne sat in the wide northern balcony, the highest point in the palace, overlooking the lower levels and the central court within, and commanding a view across the ridge up to the snow-capped peak of Ida.

Lingering over their light breakfast, the girls daintily broke off bits of hard, flaky cheese, laid them upon fingerlike strips of wheaten bread, and ate slowly. Between bites they toyed with dainty handled cups of thinnest porcelain, tinted like the white-fleeced Mediterranean sky above them.

"Is it not beautiful?" Ilia cried eagerly, pointing to the new-reaped plain, the

gently-rolling hills, covered with groves of ripening olives, nearly ready for the press, and the abrupt sweep of the cloud-tipped mountains beyond.

Ariadne smiled.

"Yes, it is beautiful," she answered, "but there is a fairer sight than this. Look yonder!"

And she pointed westward, where a slow, winding stream wandered through the thick olive-groves, past the extremity of the Phæstian range, diademed with an exquisite villa, the Summer residence of Ambrogeos. The sun shone full on its smooth gray walls, so that it stood out cameo-like from the face of the sharp peak beyond.

"This is indeed a lovely land," breathed Ilia.

"You may well say so, and its loveliness rests secure upon a strength that none but the gods can shake."

As Ariadne spoke, Ilia's arm dislodged one of the thin cups from the little table, and it fell to the stone floor, shattering to fragments. She turned about with a little cry of dismay; and as she looked down at the broken cup, her attention was caught by a stir in the palace court below. She seized Ariadne's arm and pointed.

A group of ten or more ragged fisher-folk had come in by the southwest entrance, four of them carrying a half-naked man, whose arms hung limply down, nearly trailing the pavement. Behind the group, a line of blood-drops marked their way.

"He is dead!" Ilia exclaimed.

"Not yet," Ariadne answered. "Let us go down."

They ran quickly down the narrow stair to the lower level, through a small peristyle hall, and followed twisting passages till they emerged into the central court. Already a crowd of greasy aproned kitchen-knaves, and gaping women servants had gathered about the fishermen, who had laid the wounded man upon the limestone paving. Ariadne hurried up, her short skirts swirling about her ankles.

"Lift him off those cold stones!" she commanded. "Carry him to the guest-chamber. This way! Follow me!"

The men obeyed dumbly. The princess led the way to the chamber, the crowd of domestics tagging curiously after. She turned upon them.

"Give him air!" she cried sharply. "Be-gone!"

Abashed, they took themselves hastily off. "Now lay him on the bed," Ariadne ordered.

The fisher-folk, awed by the presence of their lady, did as she bade them.

"Where did you find him?" she asked incisively.

The oldest fisherman bowed awkwardly, stammered in embarrassment, and at last brought out that they had found him lying on the beach, wet and bleeding.

Ariadne turned to Ilia.

"Go you to my apartments," she urged. "Find my woman Cleantha, and bid her give you bandages and oil."

Ilia hurried away and returned almost immediately, carrying a cruse of olive-oil and many strips of linen. The fishermen had gone. Turning the senseless man upon his face, Ariadne indicated an ugly hole, just below the right shoulder.

"Done by a spent spear," she commented, "and a heavy one, with a broad blade."

With infinite care, she washed the wound, first with cold water from a stone jar on the floor, then with oil.

"He has bled nearly to death," she said. "He may live, but the chances are against him. The flesh is puckered; he has been long in the sea."

Ilia unfolded one of the bandages and gave it to Ariadne. Tenderly she raised the heavy shoulders, while the Cretan princess passed the band about his chest. With difficulty they got it adjusted; then, as the blood oozed slowly through, Ariadne soaked more cloth in olive-oil, and wound other strips about the injured shoulder.

"This is a bad business, my dear," she said gravely. "It is Praktos, officer of marines on the *Shark*, of the Western Fleet. He should be off Melita, with his ship. I pray no misfortune may have befallen her."

They turned the wounded man over on his uninjured side, packing him in place with soft cushions. Ever so lightly the chest heaved, his lips parted, his eyes fluttered and opened. At first he looked at them in blank amaze; then full consciousness returned for a moment and he strove to speak, but no sound came forth. Again he tried, and this time a faint, hoarse whisper issued from his lips.

"The fleet!" he gasped. "Palaikastro—warn the fleet!"

His eyes closed, and he sank into stupor

again. Ariadne looked at Ilia, her face whiter than the bandages.

"Something terrible has happened!" she exclaimed. "There has been a fight. But how did he come here?"

The minutes dragged by. Ilia urged the Cretan princess to call on her women to attend him, but Ariadne would not. She knew what the danger was. The man was in bad plight. His face grew flushed, and he moved restlessly in his unconsciousness. His brow was beaded with sweat, and from time to time he muttered broken, meaningless words. Suddenly his eyes opened wide, staring and wild with fever.

"Warn the fleet at Palaikastro!" he cried in clear, ringing tones.

"Be still," said Ilia softly. "Do not try to talk!"

But Ariadne contradicted her.

"It is something of great moment," she said. "He can not last long, and we must know before he dies!"

She laid her fingers on his pulse, measuring his vitality.

"Warn them of what?" she questioned.

The wounded man turned his fevered eyes to hers.

"Do you not know?" he gasped. "The barbarians—the fleet of Liras—destroyed!"

Ariadne cried out in alarm, and her pale face sought Ilia's; but she recovered herself at once.

"What barbarians?" she urged him.

But he was silent; the fever had him in its grip.

An hour of terror-laden silence, and Praktos was again raving in delirium. From a jumble of half-coherent mutterings, his utterances became more and more connected and intelligible, though relapsing ever and again into a meaningless blur of sounds. Bit by bit they pieced together his phrases, till the story was in their possession.

Praktos had been with the Western Fleet off Melita, when a long line of strange ships had come into sight. Liras, the admiral, had secret orders from Minos to watch for the barbarian fleet which the king, in spite of his subjects' sense of security, had been sure would some day come.

As the strange galleys drew nearer, Liras became convinced that these were their quarry. A loud outcry from the barbarians told them that they were seen in turn. The Cretan fleet waited in line ahead, their bowmen on the raised fore-and-aft bridges. A

strong wind bore the strangers swiftly up, and the battle was on.

"Oh, their mighty bows!" the sick man groaned. "Oh, the piercing arrows!"

The barbarians, taller and stronger than the Cretans, loosed their arrows at long range. The flying shafts cleared the bridges of the island galleys, while the Cretan archers, outranged, saw their own shafts fall short and splash harmlessly into the waves. One by one the Minoan galleys were disabled by arrow-shot, grappled, and boarded by the mighty-limbed barbarians who smote down every man with their ponderous swords and axes.

It was a terrible story which poured in jumbled, shapeless sentences from the twitching lips. Only one of all the proud Western Fleet had escaped—the *Octopus*, which, with nearly half its rowers dead or dying, had fled under full sail, close pursued by the victors for half a day. She made for the southeast, till at last the barbarians dropped behind, put back to Melita, and sought the shore to take stock of injuries, and refit.

The *Shark*, caught between two of the attackers, was swept clear of her crew, who were struck down into the red-running hold, or thrown bodily into the sea. Praktos was overpowered by a huge, red-bearded sailor, bound, and taken on board the leader's wolf-ship.

When the dying man spoke of this, the two girls looked at each other in startled surmise.

After fourteen days in Melita, devoted to burying their dead, tending the wounded and putting their ships in order, the barbarians sailed for Crete. Last night, he, Praktos, was unbound as the fleet approached Phæstos, and led to the poop, where the leader had commanded him to point out the course to Palaikastro.

Knowing that the Cretan ships there were drawn up on the beach, unmanned and helpless, Praktos refused, and the barbarians threatened him with death. Their leader interfered, commending his courage, and the sailors murmured against their lord. Land was near, the night was dark, and Praktos stood close to the gunwale. As the dispute was at its height, he leaped overboard and swam for shore. The barbarians shot arrows and hurled spears after him, and one had found its mark.

That was all his tale; but the rest was

clear. He had managed to make the shore, and had fainted on the beach from pain and loss of blood. Morning came, and the fishermen found him there.

His mutterings died away. As he tossed in pain, Ariadne saw that the blood was soaking through the bandages.

"Go, Ilia," she said softly. "Fetch more cloths."

Ilia left the room swiftly. Praktos opened his bloodshot eyes again, murmuring "Ilia!" At last his face lighted up.

"That is the name!" he cried aloud. "Ilia! It is she whom the tall barbarian asked of."

Ariadne started violently.

"Asked of Ilia?" she demanded. "What would he of her?"

"He spoke always of her," came the answer.

"Who spoke of Ilia?" the princess asked, her face drawn.

"The tall barbarian—I forget."

Praktos rocked as he lay on his side, moaning piteously. At last, with a convulsive effort, he sat bolt upright, his eyes starting horribly.

"Ragnarr!" he cried. "His name was Ragnarr!"

His face lightened, as if in relief to have remembered; and crying out again, "Ragnarr!" he fell back on the pillows, dead.

Ariadne stared wildly about her. Ragnarr! He had returned then, as she had longed, but had not dared to hope. But he had asked for Ilia, not for her! Ilia loved him, this she knew already. And now he loved Ilia, or he would not have asked for her.

But what of herself, Ariadne, who had freed him from the nameless death of the Minotaur; who had urged him to take her with him to his land? The sudden attack of the palace guard had separated them, and she had resigned herself to hopeless, endless renunciation. But he was back; even now, off Crete! And he loved Ilia!

Now for the first time Ariadne knew the bitter pains of jealousy and her face grew terrible. This Eastern woman whom she had befriended, whom she had even loved, now robbed her of the love of Ragnarr. Her affection for the girl curdled into hatred, into a savage lust for revenge. But not even in the fierceness of despair would she admit that it was too late for her, Ariadne, to gain

that which her heart craved. She would win him in spite of himself, if the gods will; and if they did not will it, she would fight them and wrench happiness from their unwilling arms.

Ilia entered, fresh bandages in her hands. She looked at Ariadne and stopped short, wondering at her friend's anguished features. The daughter of Minos unclenched her hands, and by sheer strength of will drove the bitterness from her face and voice.

"It is too late," she said with forced calmness. "He is dead. Go to your room and await me there."

Interpreting Ariadne's visible emotion as stirred by the news of the barbarians' coming, and augmented by the death of Praktos, Ilia was quite ignorant of the Cretan princess's feeling toward herself. She had not heard that dying outcry proclaim her lover's name, and she had not suspected a rival in the proud daughter of Minos.

She went to her chamber, therefore, quite unprepared for the sudden happenings so soon to follow. None the less, her own emotions were stirred to the highest pitch. Here, in the midst of this strong and peaceful land, Death had set his red hand-print. The mighty Western Squadron, the eyes of Crete, had been destroyed by a sudden, overwhelming blow; and by whom? By barbarians, and these barbarians were even now somewhere off this very coast. Perhaps they had already landed, and the high coastal range south of Phastos itself might be cloaking them behind its barrier, till night should come and loose them on the weakly guarded land. The danger seemed the more terrible because of its very strangeness.

The fleets of Minos had long since swept the seas of pirates; and these wild bands of marauders were now known to the Mediterranean more in the tales of old folk around the glowing brazier than in their brutal, living actuality.

But in the midst of these vague, monstrous fears, one thought of hope, even of joy, reared its head.

"The barbarian leader in his wolf-ship!" Could it be Ragnarr? She scarcely dared believe it, but the hope would not be put down. Her faith in his love was absolute; and in her heart she had not ceased to cherish the belief that some day he would come again. And if it should be—



CALLING to her the captain of the guard from the southern bastion, Ariadne gave orders that a watch be set about the body of Praktos. She hushed the officer's inquiries with a peremptory command of silent discretion till she sent for him, and went at once to her office—a great cool room off the inner court, hung with maps and lined with chests of clay tablets on which were incised the accounts and records of Phæstos.

Here she sat for a long hour, given over to anxious thoughts. It was a desperate position in which she found herself. Ragnarr was the mortal enemy of her country and had shed the blood of several thousand of its sailors. She alone among the living—save only Ilia—knew of the catastrophe; and she, as daughter of the king, was bound by duty and honor to do what she could for the safety of Crete.

Two things seemed clear: she must send the news to Knossos, and must take measures for the defense of Phæstos and the populous plain about it. But she, Princess of Crete, pledged as she was to its protection, loved Ragnarr; and her heart was torn between duty and despairing passion. Praktos had said that Ragnarr's ships were bound to Palaikastro. Unless she despatched messengers at once, the Cretan fleet there, drawn up on the shore for repairs, would be taken at a fatal disadvantage and destroyed; and she, Ariadne, would be a traitress, like Scylla, whose shameful tale she knew so well.

Scylla, slain by the gods, and cursed among men for her shame—Ariadne swore through set lips, never should Scylla's name be hers. But what was the alternative? Nearly twelve hours had passed since Praktos must have leaped into the sea from the *Grey Wolf's* deck, and it would be impossible to get word to the shipyard before the Northmen arrived. The Palaikastro fleet was doomed, in spite of all she could do.

How many galleys were at Knossos? Ariadne did not know, nor did she realize, how the forces there had been depleted to scour the sea for Ragnarr's coming. Anyhow, it would take six hours by chariot to reach her father's palace, and at least as many more for the Knossos fleet to reach Palaikastro. By that time the naval base would be a smoking ruin.

Whatever she could do would be too late to save the threatened port and the help-

less galleys in its yards. She would only involve Ragnarr in peril. She thought of Ragnarr, lying pierced and bleeding on his shattered ship, or taken alive to be thrown to the Minotaur, and a cry burst from her set, white lips. No, she could not do that. His brave, frank face, with its sea-blue eyes, his tall comeliness, the waving gold of his hair, floated before her vision, and love claimed its tribute.

Suddenly it came to her. Why had she not thought before? Swiftly calculating on her fingers, Ariadne recalled that it was a scant ten days since word had come from Ambrogeos that his business in Egypt was all but done, and he could return at once. His course would naturally bring him to Palaikastro, where he would expect to dock his ships, and take chariot for Knossos. He would come just after the Northmen's victorious onslaught, in time to catch them off their ships, scattered, burning and pillaging. Nothing could save them.

Nothing but Ariadne. In an instant her plan was formed. Having warned Knossos, she would get Ilia out of reach, send word to Ragnarr, and bid him come to her, leaving his fleet behind. She would point out his hopeless situation, with the fleets of Minos and Ambrogeos behind him, and urge him by all she had done for his sake to take her on his ship and flee to the North. Thus, at one stroke, she might save Crete and win the man she loved.

Clapping her hands thrice, she summoned the woman in attendance.

"Go to the stables," she directed, "and send Phalas hither. When he has gone, bring Isca to me."

The woman glided silently on her errand. In a few moments the full-stomached master of the horse bowed before the princess, his bronze stylus and small tablets of soft clay at his ample girdle.

"What teams are in the stables?" she demanded brusquely.

"The fleet-footed grays, the heavy blacks, and the chestnut mares, my lady," answered Phalas.

"Harness them all, the grays to a light, open chariot," Ariadne ordered. "Have them ready as swiftly as may be."

He bowed and turned to go.

"Stay!" cried the princess. "Can you keep counsel?"

"Even as the dumb."

"Then you will serve. Get out my own

state chariot, the bronze-walled one, and hitch the blacks to it. Give this signet to the captain of the guard, bid him take the Lady Ilia, whether she will or no, and drive her to Knossos, under heavy escort. Let him report to the king that pirates have sunk the Western Fleet and are attacking the coast. No word of this to the Lady Ilia, look you!

"Give out the news through the countryside that the fields and villages are to be abandoned. Let all hasten to the prince's villa, which can be better defended than this rambling palace. No men need be left behind to guard Phæstos, for all valuables are to be sent to the villa. Bid the servants get them packed and ready. Collect the horses from the fields, and harness them to heavy wagons to carry the gear. That is all."

Phalas departed, wheezing with excitement and haste. Scarcely had he gone when Isca, whom Ariadne trusted above all her women, entered through the ante-chamber. She was a taciturn girl, short and sturdy, who had been brought a child from Iberia as a present to the princess. Turning her black eyes full on Ariadne, she waited.

Ariadne took the square, manlike chin in her white fingers, and lifted the faithful face to hers.

"Do you fear death, Isca?" she asked.

The girl's eyes flashed, and her firm mouth set.

"Not in your service," she replied.

"There may be worse than death in this, unless you are prudent and the gods most kind. It is a hazardous game, and much lies at stake."

"I will play it so much the better, then," Isca answered.

Ariadne's heart was touched, so that she almost changed her purpose; but the thought of Ragnar possessed her.

"You will find the grays ready harnessed," she said, her words coming in a torrent. "Drive with all speed to Palaikastro, changing horses at every post. If any question you, plead the king's business, and the swiftest horses will be at your disposal. You will find Palaikastro in the hands of barbarian pirates, the men of Prince Ragnar, whom you saw when he was at Knossos. You will need all your courage and resource to keep out of their hands till you can find the prince. Say these words to him: 'If you would find Ilia, come at once

to Phæstos. Seek the northern gate.' You will return with him and guide him hither."

Isca's face was grave, but her eyes showed no unreadiness. She repeated the message slowly, then raised her mistress's hand, kissed it, and withdrew.

Closing the door of her office, Ariadne entered the court. It was full of bustling men and disheveled women, frantically wrapping up and packing away ornaments of gold and silver, cups and vases of priceless porcelain, marble statues, wonderfully chased bowls and vases of copper and bronze, and bags of ingots and coin.

As fast as these were checked off and packed, they were borne down the western corridor through the servants' quarter, outside which waited a long string of carts and wains. In the entrance to the corridor stood Orchos, Captain of the Guard, superintending the removal. Ariadne approached him and spoke softly in his ear.

"Yes, they are orderly enough," he answered. "I told them that the pirates have gone by, and that the king's fleet is taking care of them. It will be ill handling these cattle when they smell the truth."

"Where is the Lady Ilia?" asked Ariadne.

"Safe in the hands of two of my soldiers, waiting for the chariot to be brought round."

"Does she know she is to go to Knossos?"

"She knows, and demands to see your Highness," Orchos answered. "I told her you would follow shortly."

"It is well," the princess replied. "Now go. I can attend to matters here. Say to the king that I am safe and will be in Knossos before morning; there is no need for him to send aid, for the barbarians will be at Palaikastro, and all his forces will be needed there."

CHAPTER XXIV

INVASION

CHANGING horses at every town, Isca was whirled along at breathless speed over the perfect Cretan high road toward Palaikastro. At times the light chariot hardly kept on the road, and twice, at sharp corners, it nearly overturned. But the girl was an intrepid driver, and urged each galloping pair to furious efforts.

By noon she had covered a third of her journey; before the afternoon was half over her horses dashed into the town of Vasiliki,

panting and foaming. As she reined them up at the post two of the guards came running out and seized the headstalls.

"Where do you go so fast?" one challenged her.

"To Palaikastro, on the king's errand!" Isca replied breathlessly.

The men saluted and sped for the best team in the stable. Within ten minutes she left the little town behind her, making for Præsos, the next station, eight miles away.

As she topped the crest of the hill midway between the two places, Isca reined in her horses with an instinctive cry of alarm. Dust rose from the valley below her, and out of it a long column of men and animals came toiling up the steep slope.

Her first thought was that these were the enemy; then she saw the bright-colored skirts and head-dresses of many women, and the little children among them, and realized that these were the people of Præsos, fleeing before the invaders. At the sight of her chariot the two nearest men threw down their loads and sprang forward, eager to seize it for their own salvation.

But instead of turning or parleying as they expected, the girl cracked her whip and the chariot came thundering down the long paved slope, scattering all to right and left. Donkeys and cattle stampeded wildly, or moved out of the way with terrifying reluctance; men and women shrieked threats, warnings and curses at the unheeding charioteer as she sped past.

Soon she swung into the main street of Præsos, and the drumming of her horses' hoofs, and the rattle of the chariot-wheels were the sole sounds that broke the desolate silence. House doors stood open, bits of broken pottery strewn the stone thresholds or flew spinning from her horses' feet.

In all the town there was no living thing save a magpie in a wicker cage, hanging beside the door of the wine-shop. Neither man nor horse remained at the post. Isca realized that she must drive the remaining distance with her wearied team. It was not long; with fresh horses she could have made it in another hour. But now it was necessary to save their flagging strength, and she drove off at a jogging pace.

The declining sun threw their shadows far ahead of them as she rolled on toward Palaikastro. A league further on she brought the whip about the horses' flanks, and they made a half-hearted spurt. She

kept them to the pace with difficulty, using the lash at frequent intervals.

Slowly the sun crept to the horizon, and dusk came on. The evening breeze arose, carrying to her ears the sound of confused shouting. Less than a mile to go, and the horses were stumbling. She laid the whip on mercilessly, urging them to their utmost.

The darkness fell, and through it the gray stone roadway showed dimly only a few feet ahead. From there on, however, the way was straight, and Isca plied the whip incessantly. The noise grew louder: the triumphant shouting of men and the shrieks of women.

Suddenly a red tongue of fire clove the darkness, and with incredible swiftness the flames spread, enveloping the whole town before her, throwing the outlines of dwellings, shops, and warehouses into bold relief against the blazing sky. From doors and windows the flames belched and roared, mounting above the doomed buildings in twisting, leaping masses. Now and again a house fell in with a rumbling crash of brick and stones.

In the firelight Isca could see tall, long-haired men running among the ruins, dancing in triumph in the streets, or staggering down to the shore beneath heavy burdens of plunder. Straight down the wreckage-strewn street she drove, shuddering at the still, sprawling figures that lay by the roadside, the horses swerving again and again to avoid the bodies of the slain. She was used to death, and could remember how the home of her childhood had been ravaged by the Cretan fleet; but the hungry flames on either side, whose heat scorched her cheeks, and which seemed to stretch out cruel fingers for her as she passed, filled her with sudden panic.

She feared to go on, sickening with fear at the sight of the frenzied barbarians into whose hands she was speeding; but she choked the terror down, repeating the princess's message over and over.

Now she came to a cross street, and urged her horses faster. A gleam in the fire-shot dark, and a spear quivered in the off horse's flank. The stricken beast groaned and fell, bringing down its team-mate with it, and snapping the pole.

As the chariot swayed and tilted, Isca felt herself lifted clear by a mighty arm. She was set roughly on her feet, and he who held her turned her toward him so that the

firelight fell on her face. She looked up at him in affright, and tried to wrench free. A loud laugh went up, and she saw that she was surrounded by wild, huge men, well armed and laden with loot.

One of them seized the girl's shoulder, striving to take her from her captor. Tugged and pushed about between them she struggled in vain to get free.

Her hair tumbled about her face; her arms were bruised in their rough grasp. She screamed aloud, and the barbarians roared with amusement. At last Isca heard a blow, followed by a grunt of pain, and felt herself swung up against a brawny chest. Two arms held her close, and she was borne swiftly toward the shore.

Suddenly a voice rang out in a tongue Isca could not understand. Her captors stopped, and he that held her growled a savage answer. The voice came again, sharp and insistent. The men looked at each other, muttering discontentedly.

Isca suddenly put forth all her young strength, getting her shoulders free from the encircling arm. Looking up she saw the tall, soldierly figure of a young man, with a bloody sword in his right hand, and a blazing firebrand in his left. His face was young and frank, yet he had the bearing of one in authority.

Stretching her free arm toward him she cried out to him. He shook his head, uncomprehending, and turned to the men with a gesture of command. Despairing she cried again, this time in the merchant dialect; but he did not answer, for he had never before gone voyaging and knew only his own tongue. Isca felt the imprisoning arm tighten about her, and fear lent her resource. There was one word these men would know.

"Ragnarr!" she cried. "Ragnarr!"

The officer started and looked at her sharply from his keen blue eyes.

"Ragnarr!" she urged, her voice unsteady with terror.

Ulf of Wolsdale—for it was he—stared at this captive woman who knew his leader's name, and at last it dawned upon him that the prince had spoken much of one Ilia, whom he loved and hoped to rescue. Could this be she? If so, it would go ill with any Northman who did her harm. He spoke rapidly to the man who held her, but the fellow only grasped her tighter, grumbling in surly fashion.

Ulf's eyes blazed. He dropped his torch

and leaped for the sailor's throat. His hand shot past Isca and found its mark. The huge ruffian gasped once, then the sinewy fingers tightened and the arms that imprisoned Isca relaxed. Slipping to the ground she saw Ulf choke his mutinous subordinate to death and hurl the carrion from him. Then the young chief took Isca's hand and led her through the flaming town.

Ragnarr's fleet had sighted Palaikastro at noon on that same day. But the watchful Cretan scout-ships were on guard in the offing, and dashed in with the news. Scarcely a score of fighting-ships lay at anchor in the harbor, for the Autumn had come, when storms put an end to commerce until Spring.

Most of the great Cretan fleet was drawn up high and dry for the season's overhauling; the masts unstepped, and the gear and tackle stored in the long, rambling sail-lofts and storehouses. Nearly a hundred galleys lay careened on the shore, while workmen scraped away the barnacles and weed, and shipwrights repaired the injured planking. The seamen and marines were mostly scattered over the island, helping the country-folk gather the unprecedented harvest.

The alarm was given, trumpets were blown; ships fit for service were thrust out quickly; the depleted coast-guard seized such of the interned galleys as they could man, dragged them to the water and thrust them forth. The officers sent men to the storehouses for fresh supplies of arrows and throwing spears. Such means of resistance as were at hand were speedily organized. There was no time to send for help. No men could be spared to warn the inland towns.

Not twoscore Cretan ships were in the water when the Northmen entered the curving bay, their galleys swooping in on both sides, drawing a net of destruction 'round the doomed defenders. As they came close the northern arrows fell like hail, sweeping their foemen's open decks.

Resistance was vain, flight impossible. Driven ashore by the murderous archery, the Cretans leaped from their decks to the beach and ran in panic into the town. But the merciless enemy followed close, galling them with shafts as they fled.

The northern crews dropped overside, waded ashore, and harried the Cretans through the streets, cutting them down from behind. With wild shouts of victory the

barbarians raged through the helpless town, killing till there were no more to kill.

By sunset not a Cretan man was left alive in Palaikastro. Ragnarr restrained the blood lust of his men as well as he could, and by threatening the disobedient with death, succeeded so far that most of the women and children were saved and allowed to escape down the road to Præsos.

The fighting over, the wild Northmen scattered over the town, looting and pillaging. Storehouses were broken into, and the heaped-up wares within were carried to the ships. Gold, silver, and jewels were torn from their hiding-places, and the savage seamen fought over them in the streets.

A few women, lingering by their ravaged homes, were seized and dragged away. Gudmund the Greedy, seeking treasure, burst in the door of a stone vault behind the officers' quarters, and came upon row on row of wine-jars. He smashed the clay seals with his ax, and his band drank till their brains were maddened with the heady wine. More than a dozen men lay in drunken stupor on the floor, and the others rushed forth in the frenzy of intoxication.

In the cook-house of the officers' mess, braziers of charcoal were still hot with the cooking fires. The drunken freebooters overturned the braziers and scattered the glowing coals. Every bit of woodwork was ripped away in search of plunder and cast in wild confusion over the floor.

Suddenly fire broke out. The maddened Northmen snatched up pieces of flaming wood and led by Gudmund, dashed down the streets, hurling firebrands through the open doorways. Soon the whole town was blazing, and the conflagration, borne on the evening wind, threatened to leap the main roadway and catch the shipyards.

Ragnarr was on the shore directing his men, as they hauled up their own galleys and the captured Cretan ships. He planned to remain two days at Palaikastro for repairs, for he thought that the Cretan sea power had been broken.

As the flames of the burning town shot up through the darkness and were reflected in the water of the bay he turned and saw the street by the barracks wrapped in flames. Leaving the ships to Valgard, the prince ran up the beach into the town, stopping every band and group of sailors, and shouting orders to the chiefs. Palaikastro was small, and it was not long before

the greater part of his men were assembled. Pointing to the shipyards, Ragnarr commanded them to get jars, fill them with water from the bay, and fight off the fire. Quickly the men formed long lines from the fire to the water's edge, passing the jars from hand to hand.

Ragnarr stood at the first street corner from the main quay, directing the work on a blazing three-story dwelling, from which sparks and burning plank-ends were flying. His clothes and face were begrimed with smoke and scorched with heat.

A hand plucked at his sleeve. Ragnarr turned swiftly and beheld Ulf of Wolfdale by whose side stood a young woman in Cretan garb.

"Ilia, Master," Ulf said briefly, pointing to his companion.

Ragnarr turned to her with an eager cry, and at once his face clouded with disappointment. Before he could speak Isca uttered her message in the merchant dialect.

"If you would see Ilia come at once to Phæstos."

"Is she at Phæstos, then?" he asked quickly.

"She is," Isca answered.

"How far is it thither by sea?"

"Some sixteen hours. I will guide you."

Ragnarr turned to Ulf.

"Take my place here," he commanded.

"Keep our fellows in hand as well as you can. Come, maiden."

He strode to the shore, Isca striving to keep up with him. Valgard had completed his task and stood guard over the ships.

"Where is King Gorm?" the prince questioned him.

"Garnering in the arms which the Cretans stored in the great warehouse yonder," Valgard answered, pointing to a massive stone building on the eastern headland.

"Fetch him," Ragnarr commanded.

Valgard hastened along the beach and disappeared into the darkness.

The prince tried to question Isca, but the girl would only repeat her message, insisting that she knew no more.

"How did you know we were here?" he asked, suddenly suspicious.

"The princess was on the eastern shore of the Plain of Messara yesterday morning," the girl lied, "and saw your fleet go by, sailing east. She knew that you must be bound for Palaikastro."

Two mighty figures came out from the gloom, and Valgard stood before the prince, King Gorm of the Southern Swedes beside him. Ragnarr laid his hand on the old royal adventurer's arm.

"My friend," he said, "I have received a sign from one who wishes me well, and must sail at once for Phæstos. I shall return in forty hours. I pray you, keep a sharp watch. I place my men in your hands; look to them strictly and keep them sober. Fare you well."

King Gorm seized his young leader's hand and shook it warmly.

"Keep your eyes out for a trap, brother!" he said in a bluff, roaring voice.

"It will be a stout trap that holds the Wolf," Ragnarr answered. "Valgard, get the men together. We go with nine ships."

In an hour's time the *Gray Wolf* glided from the harbor, four sturdy galleys on either side. Before them lay the dark sea; behind, the dying fires glowed redly on ruined Palaikastro.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LADY OF PHÆSTOS

WHEN day broke Ragnarr stood on the *Gray Wolf's* fore-deck, scanning the sea that opened out before him as the light grew. His ships were—all nine—in sight, and among them a newcomer, a broad-beamed, hulking galley—Gudmund's ship, the *Boar*. Ragnarr called Valgard to him and pointed her out.

"Who gave yonder swine leave to come with us?" he asked.

"I know not, Master," the old man answered. "I saw her but now, with the first light of dawn. The Greedy One must have seen us leave and followed us in hope of fresh booty."

"He will find none where we go," the prince answered, "and he would best conduct himself better than he has ere now, or his life will be short. Pull athwart him, for I have words for his ear."

Valgard hurried aft to relieve the helmsman. The *Wolf* swung to port and drew across the *Boar's* path. Gudmund stood in the bow, a ferocious scowl on his dark forehead, which throbbed miserably from the effect of too much Cretan wine. Ragnarr hailed him loudly.

"What do you here, glutton?" he shouted.

"I feared danger for you, O Prince, and I brought my men to help you," Gudmund bellowed, wincing at the pain that hammered at his temples. "And if there should be spoil——"

"No spoil for you, nor for any here," Ragnarr cried impatiently. "But since you have come so far you may as well go farther. Drop behind now, by Eric's *Tusker*. We will have the two swine together."

A loud laugh of derision rang from the throat of Eric, just astern of the *Wolf*. No love was lost between Gudmund the Greedy, and the young chieftain who was called the Boar, for Gudmund had usurped his surname, fashioning his figurehead after that of the more famous fighter.

Ragnarr kept his little squadron well out to sea, purposing to reach Phæstos at night, and not desiring to be seen from the shore. It was ordinarily a sixteen hour's run from Palaikastro, but he must hold his ships to a slow speed, or he would arrive before dark. They rowed on at a low, steady stroke, all sails furled.

When the sun sank before them, they drew closer in shore. Now they were south of the plain of Messara, from which the lofty coast-range shut off their view. Three hours after sunset they drew into the little bay south of Phæstos, the anchorage which Isca pointed out to them. To the left of it the new-risen moon silvered the mountaintops with the splendor of its fulness; and, outlined in its light, a break in the rocky wall showed the sea-gate to Phæstos.



The Northmen disembarked in silence, guarding against the least noise. The ships were anchored close to shore but not beached, for Ragnarr feared treachery, and it might be necessary to depart in haste.

Valgard was left behind with a guard of two hundred men, and the rest, over four hundred strong, followed Ragnarr and Isca, who led the way up and through the cleft in the hills. Knowing the man's genius for making trouble Ragnarr kept Gudmund by him.

The little host wound through the pass unseen, but vigilant. In not much more than an hour they debouched into the broad plain, white in the moonlight, shaded in great, blurry patches by the olive groves. Before them like an island in the plain, rose a high-shouldered hill, upholding the moonlit loveliness of glorious Phæstos.

With one accord the Northmen halted. All eyes were fixed on the radiant palace, so utterly unlike any habitation they had ever seen or heard men tell of. The barbarians stood a while in silent awe before its surpassing beauty.

Rolf Red-Axe turned uneasily to the prince.

"This is the home of the gods," he whispered hoarsely. "Would you lead us hither before our time?"

Gudmund the Greedy recovered first. His little eyes, red from his debauch and gleaming evilly, he threw his head back and gave a wicked laugh.

"No house of the gods, Rolf Rusty-brain," he giped, "but a fair and lovely place to sack. There should be fine killing there, too."

"If so, take heed that you be not the first to die," Rolf flung back at him grimly. "But I do not believe that the hands of man raised this fair dwelling. Look, O Prince, how its gray sides gleam in the moonlight, like an icy mountain beneath the frosty stars of Winter."

Hjalti the Bard, on Gudmund's other side, gave an impatient snort.

"Lo, this is what comes of staying by the fire while others travel!" he boasted. "In all this array not a score of you have ever left our own small island before, and, like the fools you are, you fall to worshipping the first fine hall you see. If you had once set eyes on Knossos you would think small of this."

"Enough," interposed Ragnarr. "While we stand here in the moonlight we are a mark for all the eyes in Phæstos. Forward, now, and keep in the shade of those trees as much as you may."

Following the line of the groves, taking advantage of every patch of darkness, the Northmen crept on toward the palace.

"The northern gate," Isca whispered to Ragnarr. "Bear to the left."

They skirted the base of the hill, stealing along in breathless silence. Rounding its shoulder Ragnarr held out his hand, warning his men to halt. An extensive olive grove grew on the northern slope, sweeping down onto the plain before them. He picked out fifty men from the close-gathered warriors, including Gudmund, whom he dared not leave out of his sight.

"Bide you here with the others," he cautioned Rolf, "among these trees. Do not

venture out of the shadow. If I sound my horn, or you hear tumult, come forth in haste."

Beyond the grove a paved road led up the slope. At the head of his chosen fifty Ragnarr climbed swiftly up toward the northern entrance of the palace, which lay white and huge before them. At the top a flight of stone steps led straight from the road into the interior of the building. Not a guard was to be seen. The place was desolate. Ragnarr turned menacingly to Isca.

"Is this a trap?" he asked sternly.

"In all Phæstos there remains no one save a solitary woman," she answered. "If you would see her, enter without fear."

"Up quickly, then, and keep together!" he commanded his Northmen.

Up they dashed with ready weapons, scaling the steps in swift bounds. At the top they saw before them a long, roofless court, brightly illumined by the rays of the moon, which shone in over the outer wall on their right.

Emerging into the court the Northmen stopped in sheer surprise. At their left a mighty limestone stairway, more than forty feet in width, rose to a many-columned portico. As they stared up at its massive grandeur, a dim figure came out from the dark above, walking as if to meet them. As it approached the stair the full glory of the moon fell upon it, revealing the face and form of Ariadne, outlining in sharp relief her dark-robed figure against the blackness beyond, and gleaming on the whiteness of her face and bare throat.

Ragnarr looked up at her amazed. Her beauty, heightened by the weird light and set off by her clinging, wonderfully fashioned garments, seemed to him a marvelous and unearthly thing. He stood motionless, incapable of speech. About him his men gazed at the vision in awe, believing her the goddess of the place.

She spoke at last, the sweet tones of her voice softened in the dark distance of the palace.

"You have come," she said, extending her white arms toward Ragnarr. "I have waited long."

He found speech at last, and voiced the thought that was uppermost in his heart.

"Where is Ilia?" he cried.

"She is safe," the princess answered. "But I have much to say to you that will not bear delay—for the sake of your own safety

and your followers. But it must be said in private."

Ragnarr was silent for a space.

"Where shall I send them?" he inquired at length.

"Bid them go down the hall and wait for you in the corridor beyond."

He turned to his men, and, speaking in their own tongue, gave them the princess's instructions. Gudmund, his eyes shining with delight, led the way, and in a moment the court was empty.

Ariadne descended slowly, step by step.

"You had not forgotten me?" she asked, turning reproachful eyes upon him.

"How could I?" he protested. "I owe my life to you, and the lives of my good fellows. Your kind deed has never left my grateful memory, and never will."

"Yet you left me here behind when I would have gone with you to escape from my cruel people," she accused him; but before he could answer the unjust charge she laid her finger on his lips.

"No, I know it was not your fault. The gods willed that I should remain to save you again."

She raised her eyes to his, radiant as with happiness.

"To save me?" he echoed. "Am I in danger then?"

"Who is not in danger, being in a strange land and surrounded by foes?" she asked.

Thinking of the men of her race who owed their death to him he dropped his eyes. It seemed that she did not know the fate of the Cretan ships.

"Yet I am not in danger," he answered, slowly and unwillingly. "Princess, I have made an ill return for your goodness to me. It is not long since my fleet destroyed five-score of your father's ships off Melita, and but last night I left Palaikastro a smoking ruin. How can you save me then? It is rather my privilege to save you from my wild followers."

"All these things I know," Ariadne replied calmly. "Yet you have only escaped one peril to fall into a greater that will overwhelm you. My brother has left Egypt with a fleet mightier than yours, and doubtless even now has reached Palaikastro. Your ships are drawn up on the beach against storms; your men are scattered through the countryside, bent on riot and pillage. Ambrogeos will catch you as you caught my father's galleys, and crush your

host to powder. I sent my messenger to lure you hither, that you at least might be saved from the doom that swoops down upon your men."

She paused and looked long and tenderly upon him.

He stared at her in consternation.

"You sent for me!" he exclaimed. "What of Ilia then, whom I came to seek? Your woman said she was here. Is it well with her?"

"She is at Knossos, where I sent her," Ariadne answered, with a touch of impatience, "safe and well. But cease to think of her. You can not reach her now; my brother holds the sea. You have gone as far as you can. Your ships are broken and destroyed by now, or fighting vainly against superior numbers. If you return you can not save them, and you would only rush into the arms of death. Had you stayed you would never have lived to see tomorrow's sun."

A great anger welled up within him. This woman had decoyed him away from his men in the hour of their danger, using the name of one he loved to draw him. Moreover, she had sent Ilia away and deprived him of the joyful hopes with which he came.

Why did she use him thus? What was her purpose? If, through her schemes his faithful crews were dying in his quarrel, what could he say to them in the land beyond the grave to excuse his futile absence? He should be with them in victory or destruction to the end. He turned on Ariadne, furious, but she checked him.

"You have but one chance," she declared impressively. "Your only hope is flight, and flight at once, before my victorious brother seeks me, or Minos marches down from Knossos, to learn why his daughter lingers here alone."

Ragnarr could no longer be restrained.

"But my ships!" he cried. "My men! Do you think I would leave them to perish alone? You have put a trick upon me to save my life; I thank you for the purpose but I owe you nothing for the trick! I go back to die with my men!"

Before she could answer, wild shouts re-echoed from within, and there came the sound of many feet on the stone pavements. Ariadne turned an alarmed face to Ragnarr, whose head was thrown back, sniffing the air.

"Fire!" he cried. "The fools are sacking the palace!"

Ariadne gave a startled cry. Out of the corridor, at the far end of the court rushed a mob of maddened Northmen, infuriated at finding no treasure in the palace. Then wisps of smoke began to wreath themselves about the white columns above the staircase.

"My robes!" gasped Ariadne, and sped swiftly up the stairs.

The fire was there and Ragnarr knew it. When all was said, she had saved his life, if her news were true, and he could not permit her to rush into the burning palace. He bounded after her, taking three stairs at a stride, and caught up with her at the top. His arm shot out, barring the way.

"It is death," he said, pointing to the flames within.

Out from the fire and smoke a black demoniac figure rushed upon them, flourishing a lighted torch in his left hand, brandishing a broad ax in the other. It was Gudmund. He sprang at Ariadne, the heavy blade glittering above her head.

"Witch!" he screamed furiously. "What have you done with the gold?"

Ragnarr caught his upraised arm and flung him back.

"Away, fool!" he ordered. "You have done enough ill for once."

With a bellow of rage Gudmund wrenched free and swung his ax at Ragnarr's head. The prince leaped aside, and the blow fell harmlessly against the stone parapet of the staircase, blunting the bronze edge.

"By Tyr!" roared Ragnarr, and rushed in.

Before Gudmund could strike again Ragnarr seized the unhappy man about the waist lifted him at full arm-length above his head, and hurled him crashing down the stairs. He struck half-way down, fell on his shoulders, and rolled heavily to the bottom, where he lay with a broken neck.

"Muster the men!" cried Ragnarr to Hakon the Strife-Ready, who stood wide-eyed in the court below. "Go through the place and get every man. We march at once."

Ariadne put her hand upon his arm.

"You are wonderful!" she said, her eyes shining. "Now we must escape."

"We go to Palaikastro," he answered grimly, "were it a hundred deaths instead of one."

"Then let me go with you even to death," she pleaded, the tears rising to her eyes.

"Do you think I would let you from me now?" he said sternly. "You shall come with us—as a hostage for Ilia's safety!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOR THE KINGSHIP OF THE SEA

ALL night the Northmen pillaged Palaikastro, seizing or destroying whatever the fire had spared. The next day some spent in an orgy of drinking, while others proceeded as far inland as they dared, plundering the abandoned farms. Yet they got little for their pains, for the country-folk and villagers had fled even to Knossos in their terror of the invaders, taking with them all that could be carried. The despoilers straggled in during the following evening, angry and sullen, and grumbling at any restraint.

King Gorm was everywhere, threatening, entreating, striving in every way to keep the Gotland men together and sober. His own vassals were devoted to him and maintained some sort of discipline, but the proud Island-Goths laughed in his face, reminding him that they, a race of conquerors, were not the men to take orders from one who paid tribute to their lord.

When he detailed men to do sentry-duty on the twin headlands that looked out over the broad Southern waters, Bersi of the Rough Tongue sneered at the old king, and bade him watch for himself if he were afraid.

Gorm was no weakling. He cut Bersi down with his ax, and his sturdy sailors ranged themselves in a shield-ring round him. Ragnarr's men were brave, but they were still stupefied with drink. There were no more blows struck, but plenty of sullen grumbling and bitter silence.

Only Ulf of Wolfdale, whose love of Ragnarr was greater than his pride of blood, behaved in a soldierly manner. He himself stood watch and watch on the eastern headland with one of Gorm's chieftains, and it was well they did so.

On the morning of the second day, Ulf, gazing out over the sea, saw what looked like a flock of white-winged birds on the far horizon. His lusty roar brought one of his henchmen on the run.

"Ships!" cried Ulf. "Take the tidings to the king!"

The young sailor sped away on his errand,

and found Gorm surrounded by his chiefs in a half-destroyed warehouse, washing down parched Cretan wheat with diluted wine. The old king leaped to his feet at the news, and sent the chiefs to gather their warriors and see that they were well furnished with arrows. He himself hurried to the western end of the town, where the Island-Goths had ensconced themselves in the least injured houses. They derided his anxiety, laughing at the idea of attack. Gorm went at once to the shore, summoned Ulf from his post, and bade him do what he could with the mutinous grumblers.

"I will," Ulf answered eagerly, "and I have seen that which will stir them. If you climb the cliff, O king, you may behold for yourself."

Gorm toiled up the headland and looked out. There, not a league away to the southeast, and making straight for the harbor, came a great fleet, white sails gleaming and oars flashing in the sun. Their many masts and high prows marked them for Cretan ships.

Ulf dashed into the house where Ragnvald Ready-Sword sat at meat among his men.

"Up, comrades!" he cried. "The Cretans are upon us!"

Ragnvald flung back his head and laughed till his great beard wagged.

"You have been so long with Gorm's housemaids that you see a hostile fleet in every school of flying-fish," he jeered.

Ulf seized him by the shoulder and shook him angrily.

"Do not believe me!" he cried. "Come to the shore, and look for yourself. If I lie, you shall have whatsoever booty falls to me on this adventure!"

"Done!" shouted Ragnvald. "You hear, fellows?"

The whole company rushed to the shore, where Gorm's men were thrusting out the galleys. There, plain to see, the red-cheeked Cretan ships raced toward them, their white sails forming a great wedge above the water.

Ragnvald, heedless though he might be, was a good warrior. He rushed his men to their galley, and himself sped back with Ulf to the town, going through every house, and routing out captains and crews. Where Ulf would not have been believed, after his faithful service to Gorm, Ragnvald found ears as ready as his own blade.

Soon every chief was racing down to the strand, his men at his heels. Gorm's two-score galleys were already pulling out to sea in line abreast, to check the enemy till the rest were ready.

With feverish haste the Island-Goths thrust out their galleys. Fortunately Ragnarr had had time before he left to bring on board the captured Cretan arrows. The Northmen tumbled over the sides; some rushed to the rowers' benches, others tore open the arms-chests and threw out bundles of arrows and light throwing-spears. But the Cretans were very near.



AMBROGEOS stood on the *Dolphin's* fore-deck, swelling with rage and lust for revenge. Ever and again he turned to the rowers, urging them to do their utmost.

Along the port side of the fore-and-aft bridge a company of archers were drawn up, and behind them a line of pikemen rested on their long spears. The bowmen were protected by a rampart of bronze-bossed shields, locked at the edges, and lashed together with ropes. This was devised by Rhodonthos, to counteract the barbarians' superiority at long range, which had brought about the destruction of the Western fleet.

"On, you sluggards!" Ambrogeos exhorted the rowers; but Rhodonthos interfered.

Here the veteran admiral made a grave error. If the counsels of his rash young prince had prevailed, the Cretan fleet might have crushed Gorm's little squadron by sheer weight, before his consorts could come up. But Rhodonthos, trained in the formal seamanship of the Minoan navy, wanted sea-room for maneuvering his hundred and ten ships, and Palaikastro lay dead to leeward. Reluctantly, the prince deferred to the other's greater skill and experience, and the great fleet swung into line ahead, backed on its oars and awaited the Northmen's attack.

Gorm saw and prudently waited. For half an hour the opposing forces eyed each other, maneuvering for position. Slowly and steadily the Northman crept nearer, until his ships were well outside the harbor, midway between its mouth and his enemies. Now the fifty Gotland galleys came surging up and took station on either wing, extending Gorm's battle-line by more than as much again. As the Cretans saw the num-

bers of their foes, they raised a yell of hate.

Rhodonthos shouted an order, and the flag-ship's trumpeters blew a call. From ship to ship it echoed, and the vanguard bore away on the port tack to outflank the Northmen's line.

The Northern galleys could only run before the wind, wherefore their sails were furled, and the oarsmen, shielded by their mates, furnished their sole propulsion in battle. Seeing this, and trusting in their keels and handier sails to luff and wear, the Cretans came on confidently to the attack. Being superior by twenty ships, the foremost of their line were thrust forward to tack round the Northmen's left and take them in the rear.

Confident in their new shield-walls, the Cretans came too near. A gray storm of arrows swept down-wind, tearing through the tough hide shields as if they had been papyrus. Scores of the Cretan archers fell dead or wounded, bowling over the pikemen back of them, or tumbling down upon the rowers, who themselves were decimated by the deadly hail.

The surviving bowmen loosed in return, but they were badly outranged, and their shafts splashed harmlessly into the sea. What rowers were left alive let their oars trail and crouched prudently behind the bulwark.

Just as the foremost galley was coming about, the helmsman at the port steering-oar flung up his arms and dropped, pierced through the throat, and the great ship rolled helpless in the trough. A second sailor sprang for the helm, but another arrow pinned his hand to the steering-oar. The starboard helmsman threw his weight against his own long sweep and brought her slowly round. The second galley was in no better case, and the whole vanguard, swept by the galling arrows, and striving to get out of range before coming about, ran on too far and jibed sharply, to keep off the shoals northeast of the harbor mouth.

A roar of triumph rose from the Northmen, and Ulf of Wolddale, who led the left of the line, drove his fifteen galleys swiftly, in a diagonal line, between the discomfited Cretan van and their main force. As he swept by, his archers loosed their shafts incessantly, dropping the remnants of the Cretan bowmen and clearing the rowers' benches. Then he closed in upon them, each ship marking out its victim. He and

three others found themselves with a foe-man on each side.

The crippled Cretans could neither maneuver nor set up an effective resistance. One after another, the Northmen grappled them, and the huge-limbed sailors swarmed aboard. The surviving Cretan oarsmen had sought shelter behind the benches, and under the fore-and-aft bridge, and some of the boarders rushed upon bronze-headed pikes. But others swept on behind them, hacking and stabbing; and soon the red-prowed galleys were helpless hulks filled with dead and dying.

Meanwhile the main line of the Northmen were hotly engaged with their foes. Relieved of the fear of being outflanked, they drove desperately at the Cretan ships, swinging round to bring their broadsides to bear as they came within long arrow-flight. Again the greater range and power of their bows, augmented by the windage, swept their opponent's bridges, and Gorm closed in, his archers loosing ceaselessly.

Now Ulf was free of his victims, which drifted unheeded out to open sea. Moreover, he was to starboard of the Cretans, and the new head of Ambrogeos's line found itself caught on both sides.

The *Dolphin* herself was in the forefront, and suffered terribly. Fortunately for the flagship, however ill it may have been for her consorts, Ulf conceived the bold plan of dashing along the entire Cretan line, from north to south, out of range of their arrows, and pouring in a deadly hail from his own starboard rooms. The fifteen victorious galleys galled the Cretans fiercely. Caught between two fires, the men of Minos were forced to divide their archers between both sides, cutting their resisting power in half. They could not maneuver, for the main Northern fleet to windward seemed impenetrable.

His men falling to right and left, Ambrogeos raged in futile desperation.

"Oh, that faithless knave of a Pharaoh!" he stormed. "Had he stood by us, had he but sent the Egyptian archers we demanded of him, how their long-bows would drive these dogs in howling flight!"

At last Ulf's squadron passed him by to pay its attention to the ships astern, and the *Dolphin* was free to act. Swiftly the yards were swung, the helmsmen put the steering-oars hard aport, the starboard rowers pulled sharply, and her nose swung

round to face the Northern line. The swan-bowed ship of Koll the Lame stood athwart her path, spitting out futilely against the *Dolphin's* high protecting prow the arrows that but now had swept her topsides.

Rhodonthos surveyed his long battle-line, writhing beneath the Northmen's shot, or wrestling vainly at close grips with the gigantic boarders. Ship after ship the barbarians overran, and, returning to their own, cast off, leaving behind a floating shambles.

The Cretans were as helpless before the long-bows and ponderous boarding-axes of their foes as a heron beneath the swooping hawk. Caught at disadvantage by the three-foot shafts that tore through the hide bucklers, and killed the rowers at their benches, they offered a feeble resistance to the fierce boarding-parties, and one red-prowed ship after another drifted from the line, as her consorts strove vainly to bring their own broadsides within effective range. More than thirty galleys were already disposed of, and the foe not even shaken.

Suddenly Rhodonthos hurried aft, an unheard-of thought burning in his brain. There was one way only to break that terrible line, to stop that raging storm of arrows. He seized one of the steering-oars from the astonished helmsman, shouted an order to the rowers, and the forty oarsmen still uninjured bent to the blood-stained handles.

Sailing close to the wind, at the top of her splendid speed, the *Dolphin* rushed the line, bows on, straight for the tormenting broadside of Koll the Lame. Ramming was in that age a thing unknown, for the beak was not yet invented.

Too late Koll saw his danger, as the overhanging prow reared up above him. Full against the *Swan's* side the *Dolphin* struck, her forked stem-post riding up over the low shield-rail.

The light galley careened like an overturned wine-cup, filled, and was trodden under. Her crew were sucked down with her; only a few blond heads dotted the swirling water, and these were marked down by arrows from the *Dolphin's* bridge.

The Cretan flagship swept triumphantly through the Northern line, broken and shaken by the strange attack. A cry of mingled rage and fear rose from the Northmen, answered by exulting shouts from the long-suffering Cretans. The way once shown, they were not slow to follow.

One vermilion prow after another swung

round and bore down on the stupefied barbarians; one after another the slower Northern galleys were rammed and sunk by their towering adversaries. As nimbly as they could the others made way, while the Cretans dashed by them, covering them with spray from the oars.

Six-and-twenty ships were sent to the bottom; and those whose crews were skilful enough to avoid the charge were forced to leave the line. The battle was now one of wild confusion. Nearly half of the Cretans had dashed through, and were now to windward of the barbarians, who were too shaken and overwhelmed to close. The other red-prowed ships drew steadily in on the Gothic fleet, caught now between two lines of foes. Ulf's fifteen galleys to seaward closed manfully, but their arrows were spent and their numbers too few.

Gorm strove in vain to rally his dismayed crews, who knew not how to cope with this strange peril of shock-attack. Only one of the Island chiefs ventured to resume the offensive: Gautrek Yellow-Tooth, who, seeing the success of Rhodonthos's tactics, resolved on imitation. Straight for the side of a Cretan two-master that had missed her aim he rushed, driving his forefoot against her waist. The Northern ship, fastened together with thongs of leather and wooden pegs, burst asunder like a dropped bundle of fagots against the stout ribs of the bronze-riveted Cretan, and spilled her dazed sailors into the sea.

This was too much. The Northmen wailed aloud in panic terror; their oars lashed the water frantically, striking against each other. In their mad fright, ship fouled with ship, while the joyous Cretans came steadily upon them.

Nearly a score together turned tail and fled to the northward; when lo, around the corner of the island came as many more vermilion prows, the fresh squadron sent from Knossos to swell Ambrogeos's fleet. Cut off by this new foe, the barbarian galleys stopped in their flight, then, fearing the greater force behind more than their new-come adversaries, they pulled to meet them, and soon were locked in desperate conflict.

Herded together, bumping against each other, the main Northern fleet were like cattle ready for slaughter. Ringed round with foes, Ulf of Woldale battled with hopeless valor, while from his after-deck Gorm called in frenzy on his gods.

 SUDDENLY, above the tumult and the outcries, a mighty voice rang out: "Tyr! We come!" And ending her dash from Phæstos with a burst of splendid speed, the *Gray Wolf*, followed by her nine consorts, came sweeping in from the south.

Ragnarr, sizing the situation at a glance, held for the narrowing gap between the Cretan lines, ordering the archers to port, the boarders, with ax and sword, to starboard. Rolf, in the *Red Dragon*, close astern, grasped his master's purpose at once, raised his ox-horn to his lips and blew a threefold blast.

Smoothly the little squadron swung into line ahead, each captain duplicating the formation of the fighting-men. A tremendous storm of arrows swept the Cretans to port; then, sheering to starboard, the fresh galleys closed with Ulf's assailants.

Swarming over the side like cats, the Baltic seamen seized the ropes flung by their comrades and lashed the ships together.

With fierce shouts, the Northmen leaped down among the benches, stabbing and hewing. Blind with the lust of blood, they fought like madmen, clearing the bridges, killing the trapped rowers who flung themselves into the hold, till the red-streaming planks were cumbered with the dead. The rescued Ulf turned savagely on those that hemmed him in, and his no longer wearied crews grimly set in to finish what Ragnarr had begun.

Before their allied onslaught, the Cretan second line, composed of those ships which had suffered most in the early stages of the fight, broke, wavered, and was no more.

Now it was the Cretan first line that was cut off, and many of them were already crippled with the savage arrow-flight Ragnarr had poured in at short range. Now, as he cast off from his late victims to board them in turn, his fierce seamen lining the shield-rail with bloody weapons, Rhodonthos made signal to force a way to safety through the fleet of Gorm. But Ragnarr's men, greeting their prince with roars of delight, and feeling new courage rise in their hearts, rallied, reformed, and bent to their oars, to meet the Cretans half-way and lay them aboard.

Ambrogeos in the *Dolphin*, with a still formidable force, was caught between the Northmen and the shore. Before his ships

could get up ramming-speed, Ragnarr's galleys swept up and grappled the foremost with a great crashing and splintering of oars. Gorm followed fast; Ulf of Wofdale finished the last of his victims, and came speeding to play his part in the final fight.

Forty great Cretan ships still held their own; the others drifted with lifeless loads, fouling the fighting galleys. Splendidly the surviving Cretan pikemen stood their ground against the swarming boarders, and many a brawny Northman fell in mid-rush with a bronze spear-head in his throat. Yet one by one the ships of Minos were overrun and gutted, their sailors fighting fearlessly to the last.

Ariadne crouched in the *Gray Wolf's* after-hold, protected from harm by the half-deck above. To her, the battle was one long horror. Whether her brother or the Northman won, what hope was there for her? The shouts of the fighters, the screams of the wounded, the thud and shock of side against side, rang and pounded in her ears.

In the half-darkness, unseeing but hearing all the wild noise of conflict, reason nearly forsook her. At last she could stand no more. She left her shelter and emerged into the light, among the armed men. Intent on their work, they paid no heed.

Now came the jar of wood on wood, and with a yell the Northern warriors sprang onto the shield-rail and swarmed aboard the Cretan galley alongside. Ariadne looked and saw a sight of horror. It was the *Dolphin*. Over her battered sides the smitten rowers trailed their limp arms, their blood running down in streaks over the gilded planks. The fore-and-aft bridge was covered with dead and wounded.

Driven to the shelter of the high stern, a handful of officers and marines made the last sea-stand for Crete. At their head, their great shields raised, stood her brother and Rhodonthos, awaiting, with red swords poised, the attack of the Northmen in the waist. There was a rush, the flash and clatter of bronze, and the foremost Northmen went down before the long pikes of the marines. Again they came on, and again reeled back, leaving their dead behind.

Now resounded the crashing war-cry of "Tyr! Tyr!" and a second boarding-party rushed over the side, Ragnarr and Valgard at their head. Raising his huge ax, old Valgard made for Rhodonthos. A Cretan

lunged with his long lance, but the Northman took it on his shield. The admiral's sword came down, glided off the guarding ax, and fell again, grazing the veteran's shoulder.

With a roar of rage, Valgard brought down his ponderous blade. Rhodonthos raised his long shield, its peak guarding his head, but the mighty ax tore through and came out dripping. His gray head cleft to the chin, Rhodonthos the Admiral fell at his prince's feet.

Ariadne, white with horror, could not turn her eyes away. An arrow clipped off a lock of her hair, but she paid no heed. She saw the man she loved, swinging his mighty sword, no longer gray, rush on her brother. Ambrogeos cast his weak and cumbrous shield aside and waited smiling, armed only with his sword. Four Cretan marines behind him thrust their long spears in Ragnarr's face as the Northman charged. Two of their points he caught on his shield, one he parried with Tyrfring, and one glanced off his helm.

The pikemen thrust their weight against his shield, holding him off. A shock-headed Gotlander pushed past and swung at Ambrogeos with an ax. The crown prince dodged the blow and thrust his point deep into the fellow's side. As the Northman fell, Ambrogeos tore the round wooden shield from his arm and with it faced his foes.

Their backs against the poop-railing, the little brown marines fell one by one before the terrible blows of the mighty Northmen. Ambrogeos and Ragnarr now stood face to face, their eyes gleaming with hate. Ariadne was powerless to turn her eyes away.

With a cat-like spring, Ambrogeos drove his point at Ragnarr's throat. The Northman's shield went up and caught the blow. Again the Cretan thrust, and again Ragnarr parried. The Northman seemed somehow unwilling, for all his hate, to strike his adversary.

As Ragnarr parried the third thrust, his eyes flashed to the *Gray Wolf's* stern, where stood Ariadne. Ambrogeos followed the glance and saw her. His face became terrible.

"Traitor!" he cried, and hurled himself on Ragnarr, delivering blow on blow.

Ragnarr parried with shield and sword, but the Cretan's practised arm thrust the bronze point past the other's guard. Twice

it drew blood, once from his left shoulder and once below the shield-rim, grazing his thigh. Now the Northman's rage kindled, and he brought Tyrfring down with crushing force.

Ambrogeos raised his shield, but the wondrous blade clove through it, and, glancing from the pointed helmet, beat him to his knees. Ragnarr sprang above him, brandishing Tyrfring. As the sword flashed down, Ambrogeos leaped aside and thrust for his foe's unguarded right side.

Ragnarr leaped back just in time and came on again, throwing away his own shield. Blade clashed on blade, and Ambrogeos felt his wrist weakening beneath the hammer-like strokes. His thrusts grew slower, and each time the great sword of Ragnarr beat heavier against his guard. He raised his weary arm to meet its onset, and sank down beneath a crashing blow.

Round in a red circle Tyrfring flamed, shore through the bronze sword at the hilt and bit deep into the dark neck of Ambrogeos. With a shriek that rang above the din of battle, Ariadne flung herself face downward on the blood-stained planking of the *Gray Wolf*.

The Cretan fleet, the last bulwark of the Island Empire, drifted in the desolation of death upon the face of the waters. Raising a wild chant of victory, the *Gray Wolf's* crew led the triumphant galleys back into the port of Palaikastro. In the stern of his ship, Ragnarr bent over the prostrate, frantically sobbing Ariadne, striving in vain to give her consolation.

CHPATER XXVII

THE TALE OF RHAMNES

ARIADNE was lodged in the house of a merchant, which the flames had but lightly scathed. Her food was carried in to her, and the place was vigilantly guarded, for, since she had lured Ragnarr to Phæstos, he had not trusted her; and even now, though he felt deeply for her grief over her brother's death, he was determined to keep her as a hostage for Ilia.

It was a strange experience for the princess, dwelling here alone with none to wait on her; but she was too much occupied with anguish of mind to heed her surroundings much. Luckily, a clothes-chest, overlooked by the owner of the house in his hasty flight,

furnished her with a change of garments, for her own dainty robes were ruined with spray and gore. The plain gray gown of the merchant's daughter became her well, however.

Having attended to her comfort as well as he could, Ragnarr superintended the care of his many wounded, who were brought up from the ships on stretchers improvised by laying planks across the oars. Three large warehouses were emptied of their stores to serve as hospitals.

The rough surgery of the time permitted little to be done for the injured beyond drawing out the arrows or spear-heads, and bandaging the wounds. Nearly a third of them died of sepsis, for bronze leaves its ugly oxide in the hurt. The dead, whether Cretans or Northmen, were heaped up together with their weapons and buried beneath a cairn of stones torn from the fire-ravaged houses.

Most of the ships were pulled up onto the beach and dragged on rollers to the yards. The damage was heavy, hardly thirty galleys being free from started seams and shattered planking. Among the few prisoners taken were some ninety skilled shipwrights, and these Ragnarr set to work, under the supervision of his chiefs. Good tools were plentiful: hammers, saws, and chisels of bronze, with which the Cretan workmen had been wont to build and refit their own vessels.

Greatly the Northmen marveled at the saws, for such implements were strange to them. In particular they were astonished at a great circular saw of bronze, with shark-like teeth. Questioning the prisoners about its use, Ragnarr learned that it was run by a belt passing over a drum, which was turned by a treadmill worked by oxen, and that it would cut great trees or beams of any size.

After long searching through the desolate countryside, a herd of cattle was found on one of the abandoned Vasiliki farms, and a powerful steer was broken to the treadmill. The first shriek of the circular saw as it bit into a log brought the Northmen running from far and near.

"What wise little people!" exclaimed Hjalti the Bard. "A pot-lid with teeth; and how it bites! And what a song it sings!"

The captive shipwrights worked well under their grim and rather cruel taskmasters, and for two weeks the work went on with excellent progress. Then, as Ragnarr

passed through the yards, one of the Cretan workmen seemed strangely familiar. He attracted the prince's attention at first because of his clumsy efforts; but his fat face and thick waist stirred a vague recollection.

"I must ask Valgard about him," Ragnarr thought; but Valgard was tending the wounded, and the prince forgot to ask him.

Late one night at the close of the second week, Ariadne, asleep in the north room of the second floor, was waked by the sound of small stones dropping on the floor at regular intervals. She threw a heavy cloak about her, went to the window, and looked out.

"Princess!" came a hoarse whisper. "Princess Ariadne!"

"I am here," she answered softly. "Who are you that seek me?"

"Rhamnes the priest," the voice answered, and a bulky shadow moved up in the darkness. "Let me come in your window, for the doors, east and west both, are guarded."

"Can you climb?"

"Easily," he answered. "I have brought a plank from the shipyards."

"Enter swiftly, then."

In a moment he stood before her.

"How came you here?" she questioned.

"The king sent me," he answered. "Though you sent word from Phæstos that you would come soon, two days passed, and the king grew anxious. When the ships he despatched to join the Prince Ambrogeos did not return, he sent me hither for news of them and you, knowing from your message that the barbarians were here. I came at night, and returned to Knossos swiftly with the tidings of destruction.

"The king was near to madness with grief and fury, so that none dared go nigh him. For a day he sat alone in his chamber, without food, and came out at last fierce and red-eyed. He sent runners over the whole island, calling the harvesters together, picked from among them all who had seen service in the fleet, and set about organizing an army. The council of elders met to inquire his wishes, and he turned on them with words that sent them trembling home.

"The palace guard has been increased to thrice its size—every youth of noble birth has been forced into its ranks—and the merchants and peasantry were set to drilling under officers chosen from the few

marines left to us. Most of the marines, however, Minos formed into companies by themselves, and gave them the best weapons. 'By my Father the Bull!' he swore to me, 'these barbarians shall yet feel the horns of Crete!'"

"But what brings you here again?" Ariadne interrupted.

"You, princess. Minos knew that I had played the spy on him for Egypt, and cunningly too; wherefore it occurred to him at the first that I might play the spy for him. Having succeeded once in stealing hither under the Northmen's noses, he thought I might easily do so again, and bade me observe the treatment accorded you and report to him. But that cursed barbarian minstrel caught me, and, thinking me one of the prisoners seeking to escape, dragged me to the shipyards, where I have flayed all the skin from my palms—so may I from his back! I could not slip away until tonight. Having lost sight of you for four days, I came to learn how it fares with you."

"I am well, and treated with honor," said Ariadne. "But tell me: My father, as you know, is devoted to the gods. Has he not consulted them in this crisis? If I know his spirit, the Minotaur will have fed well these days."

The priest's eyes filled with an unholy light, which glowed even through the darkness of the room.

"Fed well?" he repeated. "Ay, to repletion. When Minos left his chamber after the awful tidings, he drove to Dicte in his chariot, and sought the Cave of the Bull, though it was at the forbidden season. I was with him, and the gods preserve me from such another visit! I waited outside the cave. For an hour I heard the muttering within; and when the king came forth the fear in his face almost outvied the anger. The oracle had threatened him with direst punishment for entering the sanctuary at an unlawful time, and said that 'the outland Wolf should feed in the bloody courts of Knossos!'"

Ariadne shuddered and made the sign of the goddess.

"Since then," Rhamnes continued, "the king has sacrificed nightly to the Minotaur, and has vowed a mighty holocaust for three nights hence. A thousand virgins and widows have been consecrated, and will be offered up at the third hour after sunset to the Minotaur, to appease the wrath of the

gods and bribe them to destroy the barbarians. Because she was betrothed to Prince Ambrogeos, and because the king holds that she brought all this evil upon us, the Trojan Princess Ilia is to be the first victim."

A cruel exultation filled Ariadne's breast. Her brother's death before her eyes had robbed her of all tenderness, and she herself held Ilia responsible for her sufferings. Passionate craving for vengeance had long possessed her, and now revenge seemed near.

"The guard!" gasped Rhamnes suddenly, cowering to the floor.

Heavy feet tramped past; a shout revealed the discovery of the plank, then a horned helmet rose above the window-sill. A huge shadowy bulk followed, and scrambled into the room. The trembling priest was seized in a rough grasp and thrown unceremoniously to those below. The sentry followed after, without a word to the princess.

Early the next morning old Valgard, whose duties had become much lighter now that the wounded were either dead or on the way to recovery, strolled up to the quarters of Ulf of Woldale and exchanged greetings. One of Ulf's henchmen told how a prisoner had attempted to communicate with the princess, and was now confined in the vaults below, under Ulf's watchful care. Valgard showed interest.

"Let me see this carle," he urged. "I would have sport with him. I am weary with sick-duty and would be amused."

"Come, then," said Ulf, leading him down a flight of narrow stairs into a stone-lined cellar, into which light filtered from an air-shaft.

There on the damp floor lay Rhamnes, bound hand and foot with ropes, abject terror on his face. Valgard stood over him and seized him by the chin, turning the priest's face to the light.

"By Tyr!" he roared, "this is the fellow that took Rala from us!"

Ulf looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"The death of a valued servant of our master lies at his door," Valgard explained. "Give the old carle to me, Ulf, and I will repay you for it. Never fear, I will answer to the prince."

"Take him," said Ulf with a grim smile, "and tell me how he ended."

With his heavy knife, Valgard cut the priest's bonds and lifted him ungently to his feet.

"March, wood-louse!" he roared; and assisted the Egyptian's movements with a mighty kick.

But the limbs of Rhamnes were so sore from his bonds that he could not walk. Flinging him over his shoulder, Valgard climbed the stairs with him and left the house. He walked to the end of the street with his wretched burden and disappeared into a thicket.

Ulf and his men followed after, stopping about fifty paces off. As they waited, wails of terror rang in their ears, succeeded by piercing shrieks. Then silence, and Valgard came out of the thicket, wiping his knife on a handful of leaves.



DURING the days that had passed, Ragnarr had left Ariadne to herself; not alone because he was occupied every moment with his own affairs, but chiefly because he felt that it would be hard for her to see the slayer of her brother. But now his ships and men were nearly in shape again; and as he intended to take Ariadne with him in his advance on Knossos, he found it necessary that they should have an interview. He came to see her that very afternoon, and with honest pity expressed his sorrow for the ills he had brought upon her.

He found a totally different Ariadne from the grief-broken girl he had shrunk from facing. The tidings of Rhamnes had made her conscious that she had the upper hand; nor did she pretend to conceal her assurance. She answered his protestations of regret with a regal air, replying that as the daughter and sister of heroes she knew well the fortunes of war, and bore him no malice for what he had done in fair fight.

"But what are your plans now?" she asked naively.

"I go to Knossos," he answered. "I am sorry to bring fresh disaster on your people, but while Ilia remains a captive, there is no peace between Minos and me."

She looked fixedly at him for a moment, then replied:

"It is time for a better understanding between us, Ragnarr. You have never asked why I, the daughter of Minos, twice forgot my duty to my people to serve you. You have taken my acts without question, and it never entered your mind that I had a purpose. Think now, and tell me if you can not guess what that purpose was."

Ragnarr answered at once.

"Your riddle is easy to read, princess. You saw that justice was on my side."

Ariadne laughed bitterly.

"I had no thought of justice," she retorted. "My intent was deeper, stronger. You are a stronger man than my countrymen, as I am stronger than other women. I saw that from the first, and from the first I loved you."

Ragnarr made as if to interrupt, but she would not let him speak.

"It was my love for you that made me set you free from my father's toils. It was that love again that urged me to draw you out of the net of Ambrogeos, for I believed that nothing else could save you. I knew your love for Ilia, but was mad enough to think that I could hold you from her through fear of death. I wanted you to flee and take me with you, believing that, once I had you, I could win your affection. But you had no fear, and your thoughts were all with Ilia. You fought as never man fought before, making death itself fight for you. Now I am beaten and despised."

"Not despised," Ragnarr answered, his voice quivering with pity. "If ever a woman's heart was braver, if ever woman paid more greatly or more willingly for her love, men have not told of her. But the gods willed that I should love Ilia. Know that I honor you, princess, and think of you as most noble."

"That is not enough," she broke in fiercely. "Love is not satisfied with such rewards. I must have you, and will rest content with nothing else. Listen now, for I have a bargain to make with you. I have been an ungrateful daughter, a faithless subject, and have brought disaster on my land; but I will do so no more. Minos has raised a mighty army, against which your handful would break as the wave breaks on the eternal cliffs. You can never win through to Ilia alive. She is lost to you forever. Give up all thought of her. Think on my love, which has faltered at no sacrifice. Have I not beauty, wit, resource? Am I not brave? Could you find in Ilia a bride worthier of you, better fitted for the wife of a king? Abandon this wild, fruitless enterprise, and sail back to your native land. Take me with you, and I will serve you all my life."

She saw his face grow stern, and, foreseeing his refusal, changed her appeal.

"Even if you could defeat my father's host, the entrance of your fleet into the bay of Knossos would mean your Ilia's death. But make me your wife, and I, who can prevail over Minos, will swear to save Ilia alive."

She paused, and raised her proud eyes to his.

"It can not be," Ragnarr answered firmly. "After what passed at Phæstos, I can not be sure that your words are true. Come what may, I go to Knossos."

A savage gleam came into Ariadne's eyes. "Then you will never see Ilia alive," she said slowly and with impressive emphasis. "On the second night from this, at the third hour after sunset, Ilia is to perish in the embrace of the Minotaur."

Ragnarr recoiled in horror, his face as white as chalk.

"I alone can save her," Ariadne continued. "Go to Knossos if you will, conquer its defenders if you can; but you do not know the entrance to the Temple of the Minotaur. You are no bird, and can not fly to Ilia through the peep-hole that I revealed to you. The only way is secret and cunningly hidden."

He turned upon her, frantic with despair.

"Show me the way!" he cried. "Show me the way, that I may save her; and by my gods I swear, by the holy Tyr, by his sacred sword which I bear, you shall ask nothing of me that I will not grant, to the last drop of my blood!"

Her face radiant with triumph, Ariadne caught up his words joyously.

"You have sworn!" she cried. "My price shall be yourself. Swear to take me to wife as soon as Ilia is freed, and I will show you all."

"I swear!" he answered fiercely.

"Enter the palace by the western court," she said with rapid utterance. "Go through the portico into the corridor beyond. Pass into the inner court, mount the stone stairway, and turn to the north. A short passage leads to a doorway and a hall beyond. Turn to the left, and six paces along the right-hand side the wall will ring hollow to your touch. Push against it, and a panel will open before you, revealing a narrow, twisting way, which rises a full flight, then winds in ever-widening spirals. Passages lead off to right and left to confuse the uninitiated; but you shall know the true road by the sculptured double ax along the walls.

"In due time the way straightens and descends a long flight of steps to the very rear of the palace and into a stout-timbered hall. You can reach it in no other way, for it is surrounded with unscalable walls of polished stone. This wooden hall is the lair of the Minotaur; and once within, the rest lies with you."

Ragnarr turned abruptly and strode toward the door. Pausing at the portal, he wheeled suddenly and demanded grimly—

"And after this, are you not afraid to trust yourself with me through the long years?"

"Not so," she answered with proud assurance. "I have tested you and know you for one who keeps his word to the uttermost. You will deal honestly with me; more I ask not."

"It is well, then," he replied. "Make all your preparations, for with the first light of dawn we sail for Knossos."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WOLF-PACK AND THE BULL

IN HER guarded chamber at Knossos, weary and in anguish of mind, sat Ilia. Over and over she counted the hours, so pitifully few, that still remained between her and a death the more cruel for its mystery. A month ago she would have met her doom unfalteringly; but the weeks that lay behind had brought her new joy in life, new hope in the thought of living.

Ragnarr was in Crete; and as day followed day, fresh tidings of his victories brought terror to the folk of Knossos and happiness to her. Ambrogeos was dead; never again need she fear him. At each new dawn she had walked and ran to the window, scanning the plains, expecting that any hour might show her lover's forces emerging between the hills to northward.

She did not know how heavy had been his losses, nor how long he must wait till his battered ships were ready for the voyage; and each day brought her disappointment. Yet never did she doubt his coming; never did her hope, so often deceived, fail to revive with nightfall.

Then, close on the heels of the tidings of Ragnarr's last triumph, came the fright of sudden imprisonment in her chamber, followed by the awful news of the death to which she was destined. From her win-

dows she could hear the lamentations, the despairing wails of the women doomed to perish with her, packed in the western court like cattle, guarded by the bright bronze spears of the new soldiery.

Now all was left behind her; the long-cherished love, the new-waked hopes. It was nearly noon; if Ragnarr should not come within three hours after the sinking of the morrow's sun, she must face the Minotaur.

Confusion rose in the court below: the deep tones of the soldiers' voices, first interrupted, then overwhelmed by the swelling, anguished wails of the thousand victims. A half-formed fear closed about her heart; her throat grew dry and choked. Then came the sound of feet outside her chamber, the door opened, and a leering soldier entered. Ilia rose to meet him, pale, but with royal dignity.

"It is all up, my pretty one," he said, his thick lips writhing in an evil grin. "You must come with me, for the Minotaur sups tonight."

"Tonight?" she cried in quick terror. "They told me tomorrow!"

"Ay, so it should have been, but the king's runners sped in from the coast but now with word that the barbarian fleet, under cover of the morning mist, had slipped into the harbor and was making for the shore! His most priestly Majesty does not wish them to interfere with his goodly sacrifice that is to speed the gods to our aid, so he has set the time for tonight. While you go to the Gods in the Minotaur's arms, the barbarians will be falling beneath our spears!"

The soldier folded his arms and smiled pleasantly at her.

Consternation showed on Ilia's face. Deliverance so near, so cruelly outwitted! Ragnarr not an hour's march away, confronted by the hostile spears of Crete, powerless to break through and save her! But was he powerless? She thought of his god-like deeds, and hope surged through her veins again. Surely he would crush these Islanders once more and force a way to her. The soldier broke in upon her reverie.

"You keep me waiting too long, my dear," he urged. "The priests expect you in the temple, for the rites of purification."

Ilia faced him proudly.

"Lead on!" she said; and followed him, unflinching, down the passage.



GAZING from the *Gray Wolf's* prow, Ragnarr pointed along the beach. "Look!" he cried to Valgard. "They have left us little plunder on the shore."

Little indeed, for in anticipation of their coming, Minos had ordered everything of use taken to the palace and caused all dwellings, offices, and warehouses to be burned, from the beach to the hill of Knossos, that the Northmen might find neither food, booty, nor shelter.

Valgard looked up the Kairatos, the mouth of which they were rapidly approaching.

"The river is in flood, Master," he observed cheerfully. "It will be no task at all to sail up to their very gates!"

"Take the helm, then," Ragnarr ordered, "and give the signal for the fleet to follow."

One after another, the grim ships glided up the lower reaches of the river, the *Gray Wolf* at their head. They had rowed less than half a mile when Ragnarr gave a frantic shout:

"Back on your oars!"

Smartly the rowers backed water, the river running white against their blades. Right under the bows, lay the stout mast of the sunken barge, sawn off flush with the surface of the stream. From bank to bank, the Kairatos was choked with scuttled hulks. Had it not been for the strong current, which fought the ship's advance, the oarsmen could not have checked the *Wolf's* headway in time to save her from being stove in.

"Keep her head up-stream!" Ragnarr roared to Valgard at the steering oar. "We must drop back! The channel is well blocked!"

Valgard repeated the order to the galley astern, and the word was passed from ship to ship. After careful handling, and hard fighting to keep the current from forcing them against the banks or dashing one ship against another, they worked back to the river's mouth, and spread out along the shore.

The disembarkation was swiftly carried out, and the galleys hauled up on the beach, where three-score men were to guard them against any prowling Cretan with a potful of hot coals. The rest of his men Ragnarr formed into three divisions, the Island Goths in two, headed by Ulf of Wolfdale and himself, while the third consisted of the

Southern Swedes, under their redoubtable old warrior-king.

Through the desolate port they marched and took the paved road for Knossos. Before them stretched a long wilderness of stubble fields, stripped olive-groves, and abandoned fire-blackened farms. Mile after mile they tramped; but as far as the eye could see, there was no sign of an enemy, till they came within sight of the hills that hide Knossos from the sea.

"There is the place for them to meet us, Valgard," said Ragnarr, pointing to the ridge. "See, by those olive-trees on the crest, the twinkle of the new-forged bronze!"

"Let us not keep them waiting, Master," answered the old warrior, striding on eagerly. "We shall have no sport here, in the plain."

Scarcely had he voiced this prophecy when a thunderous drumming and rumbling indescribably menacing and broken by hundreds of sharp reports, came, not from the ridge before them, but from behind the long gentle rise of land that sloped upward from their right.

Over the top of this slope leapt a long line of snow-white plumes, borne on the frontlets of blooded horses, behind whose heels gleamed brazen war-chariots. The brown-skinned drivers lashing their teams with whip and word, the helmeted warriors beside them fitting shafts to their horn-tipped bows or brandishing swords and battle-axes, the charioteers of the guard swept splendidly down on the startled Northmen's unshielded flank.

"Face to the sword-hand!" shouted Ragnarr, and the long column faced to the right and sorted itself out with desperate swiftness into a line of battle. "Axmen to the rear! Spearmen, ground pikes and kneel! Bowmen, take arrows! Notch your arrows! Draw! At the front-rank horses, aim!"

On came the chariots in a perfect crescent, thin at the points and dense at the center. Now the Cretan arrows sang about the invaders' ears, for the most part harmlessly, for good shooting is hard from a swaying, rocking car. A few score Northmen dropped with gay-feathered shafts in their breasts, but the line stood unshaken. Not till the charging horses loomed right above them, did Ragnarr give the order—

"Loose!"

The effect was terrific. At that close range, the Cretans formed a solid, living

target. The smitten horses came crashing to the ground, or reared on their hind legs, pawing the air, and shrieking in agony. Many a helmeted warrior tumbled backward from his chariot, with an arrow through breast or brain.

The thin horns of the crescent crumbled away, with hardly a soldier or horse uninjured; the deep-ranked center piled up in a horrible mass of overturned chariots, crushed and bleeding men, and horses with broken legs or breasts impaled on the chariot-poles. The impact of the rear ranks spread the whole out into a bulging wedge of dead and dying, but not a living Cretan reached the northern line.

Ragnarr's archers loosed flight after flight into the writhing mass, then, dropping their bows, they rushed in with drawn swords. After them charged the rest, brandishing their weapons and roaring with joy. The cries of the dying, the ring of ax on helmet, and the thud and chop of falling weapons formed a horrible pandemonium of death. Soon it was over, and the Northmen went about the battle-field among the smashed chariots and sprawling horses, drawing their arrows out of the dead.

"No sport?" said Ragnarr to Valgard pleasantly.

"Light work, Master," answered the old man, wiping his streaming ax. "They were fools to rush us in those little wagons. They should have waited till we were at grips with those other folk on the ridge yonder."

A somewhat free translation of the Northman's words, richly garnished with Cretan oaths, was even then being spoken by the commanding officer of the forces on the ridge—Kalyntas, captain of the port. Minos, the priest-king, had left the field for the temple; through no lack of courage, be it noted, but from an overwhelming sense of religious duty.

Kalyntas, the only officer who had foreseen the danger of the fleet's failing and an enemy's landing party attacking Knossos, had picked his position and posted his men with good judgment. To the great mass of raw levies he had assigned the defense of the steeply-sloping ridge, with all the advantage of the ground in their favor. The four companies of marines held the pass, where the road to Knossos ran through the gap between the eastern end of the ridge, and a high, almost unscalable hill, whose

other side was washed by the swift-running Kairatos. The charioteers of the guard he had stationed in a fold of the ground half a mile in advance and to the west of the main position, where snugly concealed, they were ordered to remain till the enemy should be fully occupied with the attack on the pass. Then, when notified by smoke signal, the charioteers were to charge home on the Northmen's flank and rear.

But the ardent young nobles who composed this corps—a crack volunteer organization that had never seen active service—ignored their commander's orders and tried an unsupported charge of their own on unshaken, veteran fighting men. Now the charioteers of the guard had ceased to be, and up on the ridge the remaining citizen-soldiery of Crete looked into each other's white, scared faces, or threw themselves face-downward on the turf and were very sick. This, then, was war.



"IT IS ill fighting all day on an empty stomach," said King Gorm to Ragnarr. "The sun is high, and my lads will be eating those slain horses if we bide here much longer."

Ragnarr nodded.

"Post pickets, and bid the men cook and eat what they have brought with them. The next bout will not be so easy, and they will need their strength."

Camp-fires of snapped Cretan spear-shafts and broken chariot-wheels were soon blazing up and down the roadside. Cheerfully the Northmen toasted and devoured their rations of smoked meat, and washed down the rude meal with drafts from the wine-skins brought from Palaikastro. Then the horns blew and the column fell in and advanced to storm the pass.

There a deep ditch had been dug across the road, and the earth and paving-stones used to fill and strengthen a well-built barricade of huge timbers and piled-up wagon-bodies. Behind and above this stood lines of marines, their huge, tower-shaped shields set close together, protecting the men from ankle to chin, and with no more space between them than was necessary for the play of the short pikes carried by the front rank, and the long lances borne by those behind.

The precipice on the eastern or right flank of the barricade was unscalable; the steep slope of the ridge that stretched away

from the opposite side of the pass swarmed with a great host of half-trained artisans and peasants, armed with hunting-bows, scythes, and such weapons for close work as the smiths of Knossos could improvise in the short time given them after the ruin of Ambrogeos.

The way was narrow; only a score of men could attack the barricade at a time, nor could Ragnarr extend his front without spreading out on to the steep slope of the ridge to his right, exposing the unshielded flank of his line to a rush from above. He advanced his bowmen, well supported by pikes, against the face and angle of the ridge, where their terrible shafts dispersed the Cretan archery and slingers, who had planned to gall his storming party with stones and arrows.

Ragnarr then gave the word, and charged the barricade at the head of a long column of picked swordsmen, shouting:

"Tyr! Tyr!"

The gigantic Northmen sprang down into the ditch and leaped madly up at the wall of wagons, hacking and hewing with sword and ax; but the stout timbers held. They tried to scale the rampart, but as fast as they reached the top, the long spears met their throats, and they fell back, dead or dying.

As fast as the Northmen fell, others pressed on, standing on the lifeless bodies of their comrades, but ever the steady little force behind hurled them down.

Ragnvald Ready-Sword, mounting on the broad shoulders of Eric the Boar, topped the barricade and leaped down among the defenders, slashing with desperate strength against the hedge of spears; but he was pierced by a dozen points and fell dead to earth. Eric followed him, catching the spears on his stout shield, forcing them aside. His mighty ax drove in to right and left, cleaving helmets and heads, till four of the marines had fallen; then he too fell, thrust through by the slender sword of a grizzled officer.

The half-score seamen that followed the two chiefs broke through the first rank, their strokes clearing a wide way for them; but a second line stood behind, and through this they could not win. The marines surged forward and closed up, with a windrow of dead bodies between their ranks.

Baffled and torn, the Northmen fell back, leaving the ditch half filled with corpses.

Ragnarr, his cheek torn open with a spear-point, reformed them and led them on again.

Their first wild frenzy gone, the Northmen advanced slowly, with short, deep shouts. As they came on, Ragnarr blew two blasts on his horn, and his bowmen loosed a storm of arrows at the barricade. The Cretans raised their long shields and caught such shafts as came over the rampart. Many of the arrows tore through the thin bucklers, and the ranks of the gallant marines were sorely thinned, but ever the survivors closed up, keeping the wall of shields intact.

Again the Northmen charged, and this time Ragnarr, with Valgard and two-score others at his heels, swarmed over the western end of the barricade. The third rank of Cretans swung round to meet them, and a desperate conflict followed. Hewing at the tall shields with swords and axes, stabbing with spears, they pressed the marines hard.

But the handful of Northmen that had scaled the barricade were cut off and hemmed in by overwhelming numbers. Fighting with desperate fury, twice they nearly pierced the line, but each time were hurled back, and the long spears took deadly toll of them.

Dealing terrible strokes with Tyrfring, whose edges clove through flesh and bone, hide and bronze, with uncanny ease, Ragnarr led his men on till it was evident the main attack had failed; then, seeing that the fight was hopeless, flung himself at the shield wall behind them in a fierce effort to cut a way out. Valgard was at his side, his red ax crashing down on every head that he could reach.

Slowly they forced their way through the ring of hostile shields, till the two won to the inner face of the barricade and put their backs against it. By furious fighting, the Northmen held off their fierce foes long enough to scramble up and drop back into the ditch.

Gasping and covered with blood, three and twenty battered and wounded Northmen made their way to safety by the path their prince had cut for them. The last two seamen reached down from the top of the wall, caught old Valgard under the arm-pits and swung him, croaking hoarse protests, up to safety. Ragnarr stood alone, dripping blood to the elbows, fighting in a red mist of fury, hewing through shield and

helmet, shaft and blade, with the wondrous edge of Tyrfring, till the Cretans shrank back for an instant, awestruck by what seemed a magic sword.

Just then came a furious attack led by King Gorm at the other end of the barricade. Profiting by this diversion, Ragnarr made a mighty leap, caught the top of the barricade with his left hand, drew himself up, and rolled over into the reeking ditch.

The stout arms of old King Gorm drew him up to the level of the road, and the two retreated slowly out of the red-stained pass, behind the limping rear-guard of what had been the second storming party.

"Let me lead the third charge, Master," begged Ulf of Wolddale eagerly.

Ragnarr turned and looked, not at the marines silently holding their still unshaken barricade, but at the shrieking, taunting rabble on the ridge above, and he smiled grimly.

"Storm me those heights with your Wolddale lads!" he cried. "Sweep the crest clear of those chattering carles, then pour down into the pass from the rear!"

Swiftly Ulf formed his eager men in a long line facing the front of the ridge; a blast from his horn, and they charged straight for the crest, while behind them the Northern bowmen shot their arrows high in the air, to curve far over the helmets of the attackers and fall among the defenders of the hill.

Ragnarr and King Gorm, at the head of their forces covering the mouth of the pass, stood and watched the Wolddale men breast the long, steep, slippery slope. Hacking hand- and foot-holes, where necessary, with their knives, hooking their curved ax-heads 'round the trunks of saplings, or pulling one another up with their long spear-shafts, the line swarmed upward at incredible speed.

Now the Cretans pried with levers and started great round stones, which they had gathered and placed for this very purpose, bounding and rolling down the steep slope to crush their swarming foes. With the stones came hundreds of heavy wagons, with sharpened poles and scythe-armed axles, rushing and leaping like living monsters. But Ulf's men, nimbly springing aside, let the strange missiles pass; or, if fairly caught in the path of one, each warrior crouched flat under his strong shield, and cart or boulder rolled harmlessly over and down to the plain below.

"Boys' tricks like those never yet won battles," commented old King Gorm. "Hard is the climb; but easy will be the fighting. Those troops on the ridge will never stand; I know it by the shaking of their spears!"

Even as he spoke, they saw Ulf, leading the right of his line, reach the point where the slope flattened out toward the crest, and rush, at the head of his own Wolfdalers, into the wavering ranks of a Cretan train-band.

"They break! They break!" roared Ragnarr joyfully. "On, Ulf, and sweep the summit clear!"

Along the crest and up the slope of the ridge swept the Northmen, regardless of the badly-directed arrow flight that sung about their ears. From two sides they flung themselves on the ill-trained host, who for the most part rushed eagerly and in disorder to meet the attack, thrusting aside their own officers. The heavy Northern axes and long swords cut them up cruelly.

The battle was one of professional warriors against a citizenry untrained and unaccustomed to arms. After a brief, brave, but utterly futile resistance, the Cretan militia wavered, broke, and fled down the further slope. Their officers, drawn from the marine corps, strove vainly to rally their men, and without exception fell fighting with splendid gallantry.

Ulf checked the pursuit and reformed his men at the eastern end of the ridge, above the pass. He pointed to the barricaded marines below, whose position they now dominated.

"There lies your way," he commanded. "Forward, for Ragnarr and the North!"

Down they poured upon the Cretan flank and rear, the steep descent lending force to their onrush. The shield-wall crumpled beneath their weight, and the marines were penned in between their foes' red weapons and the rocky wall behind.

"Charge!" shouted Ragnarr, and his men with Gorm's dashed at the barricade.

Unable to turn to meet this new attack, the Cretans were caught with their unshielded sides and backs to the foe. The red swords rose and sank, the axes bit fiercely, and the brave marines fell by hundreds.

As Ragnarr raised Tyrning for another blow, an officer brought down a two-handed ax upon his helmet. The treacherous weapon broke, and Ragnarr leaped in with

his sword. The Cretan drew his long dagger and thrust for Ragnarr's throat. He was too late; the mighty Northern blade came down upon his shoulder, and bit deep.

The Cretan officer fell, and his helmet rolled to the earth. Ragnarr sprang forward with a startled cry and raised the wounded man in his arms. It was Kalyntas. The blood spurted from his wound, and his deep-tanned face grew pale.

"Forgive me!" Ragnarr groaned, the hot tears rising to his eyes. "I did not know."

"It does not matter," the Cretan gasped. "You had no choice but—to strike. I forced——"

He stopped, and sweat gathered on his forehead. Ragnarr plucked at this kirtle as if to tear it to bind the other's wound.

"No," Kalyntas protested feebly. "The fight is still hot. Protect yourself; I am slain."

Ragnarr rose and bestrode him. The battle was decided now, and his men did not need him. At least none should trample on the body of his brave friend and adversary. A thought flashed upon him, and he stooped to the dying man.

"How fairs it with Ilia?" he asked.

The upturned face grew livid, and Kalyntas answered:

"She is—to be sacrificed—tonight!"

Ragnarr gave a cry of fury.

"Tonight? It was tomorrow!"

"Nay—tonight," Kalyntas gasped, and his life passed with the words.

Ragnarr's eyes glowed with wrath, and raising Tyrning high he threw himself upon the feeble remnants of the devoted marines. He struck madly, not feeling the blows that beat upon his shield. His only thought was to kill, kill, till not a Cretan should be left alive.

It was soon over. The Northmen stood in a half-circle about the hard-fought ground silently surveying the heaps of slain. The cliff against which the Cretan right had rested was splashed high with blood, and the huddled bodies of the defenders lay still about its foot, or still stood, stiff and upright, held up in grotesque mockery of life by the jammed corpses of their comrades.

Ragnarr pointed grimly to the road ahead.

"It lacks but a little of sunset," he said. "Within three hours we must take Knossos"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LABYRINTH

POURING out from the mouth of the pass, the terror-stricken citizen army flew as if winged down the long slopes and across the Knossian plain. The Northmen, who had pursued them with fierce shouts and blood-streaming weapons, would have pressed after, shooting and hacking to the very walls of the palace, but Ragnarr blew his war-horn, ordering a halt.

The more bloodthirsty of the seamen continued the chase, however, till their leader's repeated blasts warned them that danger lay in further disobedience. Slowly the host reassembled on the southward slopes.

To the right of them, the sun, already sunk below the horizon, still reddened the western clouds with its dying fire; but the plain before them and the hills behind were already wrapped in the purple shadows of descending night. To the south the last weary stragglers of the Cretan militia were entering the northern gateway of the palace, from which faint cries of grief and anger rang echoing across the plain. Tongues of fire, tossing and wavering from guard-house and bastions, told of the panic which had fallen on the house of Minos.

The impatient Northmen could hardly be held in check. Shaking their weapons, shouting their fierce war-cry, they gazed with hungry eyes toward the vast gray bulk of Knossos. At last Ragnarr calmed them and summoned the chiefs together in council.

"We have little time to waste in perilous assaults," he admonished them. "Those towers are strongly held; but there is a better way, unvalled, and perhaps unguarded. We must tarry here for half an hour, till the dark comes to hide us. Then, leaving Gorm and his host to feign the direct attack the Cretans expect, the rest of us will make a wide circuit to the west under cover of the night, and strive to reach the western court before the moon rises."

Gorm nodded, his old eyes alight.

"That is good warfare, my son," he said heartily. "When shall I rush them?"

"Not till time is," Ragnarr answered. "Ulf, your men follow mine; the rest of you in due order, each company close upon the heels of the one before. Bid your men cover

their helmets with their mantles, lest what light there is, reflect from them. We must penetrate into the very heart of the palace before we are discovered; look to it, then, that your men are silent as a bat's wing. When we are at the door of the sanctuary I will cry aloud on Tyr, and we will charge those within. Meantime do you, Gorm, take the road and advance on the northern wall. Keep just out of arrow-shot and hold the guards in play; taunt them, form your men as if for assault; but do not attack till you hear the clash and din of battle from within. Then overwhelm them swiftly and sweep through the palace."

"We understand, master," Ulf's eager voice broke in. "But it is dark as the nether hell already. Let us order the host at once."

Ragnarr gave assent, and the chieftains scattered to their companies.



A LOUD shout of defiance from the northern gate told the Island-Goths that Gorm's division had reached its post. Ragnarr ordered the advance; and, wrapped in the velvet blackness, the long line glided forward like a great serpent.

The seamen, accustomed to the swift, noiseless onslaughts of Northern warfare, stole on cat-like feet through the dark, unseen and unheard. Ragnarr led and guided them; while Valgard, now dropping back to the rear, now running forward to Ulf's command, kept constant watch lest the column break or straggle in the night-bound, unfamiliar plain.

The stratagem worked perfectly. Deceived by the vociferousness of Gorm's array, which kept well but threateningly out of range, the entire palace guard, augmented by the least demoralized fugitives from the beaten army, held the northern gate and manned the bastions. Ragnarr's men skirted the hill of Knossos, climbed its low slope and filed into the great western court, unchallenged. That entire wing of the vast abode was dark and deserted, for all but the guard had gone to attend the sacrifice.

Two by two the Northmen filed through the portico into the long corridor, crossed the inner court and stealthily mounted the narrow stair. At the top Ragnarr stopped, felt for the wall and advanced six paces to his left, as Ariadne had bidden him. Shifting his sword to his left hand he struck against the right-hand wall. It rang hollow.

He called softly to his men and thrust against the marble panel, which swung wide open with a heart-chilling screech of hinges. The sound echoed shrilly down the stone passage, tossed back from the twisting walls, and died in receding vibrations in the distance.

The Northmen stood still for an apparent eternity, clutching their swords and axes and staring fiercely into the blackness. But nothing happened; and one by one they entered the narrow opening. For a time they guided themselves by touching the walls, which, though the way was tortuous, were close together.

Suddenly the passage widened; and Ragnarr, putting out his hand to find the wall, encountered an opening. Now he remembered the words of Ariadne: that from this point on the way grew steeper and wider, in baffling spirals, with false passages to confuse the uninitiated. He must be guided, he recalled, by the sculptured double axes along the walls. But it was black-dark, and a light might bring enemies upon them.

He decided quickly, stopped his men with a low whistle and drew from his pouch the implements for making fire. With feverish speed he revolved the drill among the nest of shavings in their matrix of soft wood, and soon a bright tongue of flame, wreathed in little whorls of smoke, shone out against the blackness.

Ragnarr raised the piece of soft wood, with its glowing mass of chips, to the level of his shoulder. And now he could hardly choke back a cry of delight, for, barely illumined by the tiny flame, a stone shelf stood out in the gloom, above his upraised arm; and on it an extinguished porcelain lamp. He quickly lighted the wick and looked about him for the sign of the sacred ax. He found it at last on the further side of the false passage, whistled once more to his men and led on again.

The long line of warriors wound in and out among the confusing coils of the labyrinth, which indeed spiraled like the shell of some huge sea-snail. Having reached the top of the ascent the Northmen found themselves in the entrance to a great convoluted maze, more confounding than that from which they had just emerged, and intersected by corridors at all angles. The double axes incised in the walls led them in a seeming riot of disordered wanderings; but now the danger of losing touch with each

other grew less, for here the passages were wide enough to allow them to march six abreast.

They marveled greatly at the dizzy twists and turns of their road; and Ragnarr chafed and raged at the slowness of their progress. He dared not give way to his feelings, lest his men, whose spirits depended on his coolness, might become frenzied by the labyrinth's maddening confusion; but anger and panic fear grew terrible within him.

He had lost all count of time in this bewildering maze. It was already an hour and more after sunset when they had entered; within the second hour that followed, the sacrifice! Agony racked his brain and plucked at his heartstrings. Even while he was making the circuit of these ghastly, interminable passages, the horrid mouth of the Minotaur might be opening to receive his bride, the hungry flames might be curling about her tender body. He barely choked back a cry of horror.

Now Ragnarr noticed that his lamp no longer illumined so wide a sector of the labyrinth. He lowered it, and scrutinized it in alarm. The oil was nearly burned away. What if it should fail him entirely, before he could reach the end?

A shudder ran through his mighty frame and was answered by the muttering of his men, who had perceived the lessening of the light. Since entering the darkened passage they had pressed close together, each holding to the shoulder or mantle of the one before; now with the lamp's rays failing, there grew upon them the conviction that they were trapped. Fearing an outbreak of panic Ragnarr ventured to speak aloud, bidding them hasten, and assuring them that the end could not be far. He himself strode on as fast as he could without losing sight of the guiding sign; and ever and again he spake a word of encouragement over his shoulder, although his own heart was anxious for them, and nearly crazed with fear for Ilia.

Lower and lower burned the lamp; and still there was no sign of the end. What if their course, instead of being a spiral, were but a circle without an outlet? What if Ariadne, desperate with jealousy, had betrayed him?

Ragnarr grew dizzy with the continual twisting and turning, and sick with fear. A low, buzzing sound seemed to echo in his ears, rising and falling, now like the hum of

bees, now like the singing of a twanged bow-string. Louder and louder it grew, till it pressed upon his brains and throbbed in his temples.

It seemed to him that he staggered and must soon fall, weak and fainting, to the floor. He bit his lips angrily and forced his will to drive away the buzzing echo. The voice of Valgard, just behind him, broke in on his disturbed thoughts; guarded as it was, it seemed to shatter his ear-drums.

"We are close now, master," the old warrior was saying. "I hear many men talking."

Ragnarr roused himself with a glad heart. So that was the meaning of the sound which had oppressed him! He shook off his apathy and hurried on, holding Tyrning in a stronger clasp.

The mysterious voices swelled and took on varied pitch and cadence, then stopped abruptly. For a moment all was silence, then, muffled but unmistakable, came the sound of singing—a choral chant in men's voices.

Now, so suddenly that Ragnarr nearly fell forward, the passage became quite straight. He threw himself forward at top speed; and his men, rounding the turn, broke into a run behind him. As they strained forward a woman's shriek rang wildly through the rich-toned chant of the singers. At the sound, frenzy surged in upon Ragnarr's heart; the feeble rays of his light grew red and blurred before him.

Strength and swiftness seemed to course in his veins. He dashed on with furious speed. Again that fearful scream rang in his ears; then all at once the lamp flickered and went out.

CHAPTER XXX

THE SEA-KING'S BANE

MAD with despair, Ragnarr hurled himself forward, and recoiled, shaken and bruised, from the solid wall. His brain was cleared with the shock, however; and, though buffeted with grief and frenzy, he recovered some semblance of coolness.

He thrust out his hands and fumbled at the stone, listening intently to find where the singing sounded most clearly through the partition. Following the sound he groped along the wall, and the fingers of his left hand ran into a vertical groove.

Heaving his mighty shoulder to the right of this, he drove once more against the stone, which gave, letting him stumble forward, blinking blindly, into a brilliantly illumined hall. Though still dazed by the light, he swung his shield before him instinctively, thrust his left hand through the straps, and heaved Tyrning high in air.

Then his sight returned, and simultaneously he became aware that the chanting had ceased. His men crowded through behind him, thrusting him into the hall.

Ragnarr looked about him, and a marvelous, fearful sight met his eyes. He was at the top of a raised stair, looking down into a wooden building, high-raftered, its roof-beams stained with smoke. Far before his gaze it extended, its floor lined for half its length with rank behind rank of armed men novices of the priesthood, impressed into the army, and now recalled for the defense of the temple. At the end farthest from him, on a high, stone-throned dais, sat a high brazen image, with the body of a man and the head of an enormous bull. From the monster's feet, and stretching out along each wall, stood a twofold line of robed priests, each bearing a double ax of bronze. Shut in between these priests and the ranks of soldiers, stood a multitude of white-robed women, packed like olives in a press, their arms bound behind them, and white bandages twisted tightly about their heads.

Again Ragnarr's eyes sought the dais, straining through the bright but uneven light of the torches. There, facing the image, stood a sinewy, dark-haired man, naked to the waist, but crowned with a golden diadem. His arms were outstretched, and something limp and white dangled from them.

Up to this moment, all in the sanctuary had been staring in tense silence toward the scene of sacrifice. Now the devotee before the dais, who seemed to be the chief priest, faced about, and Ragnarr saw that the white bundle in his arms was a woman. His gaze on his victim, the high priest snatched the cloth from her face, and Ragnarr saw that it was Ilia.

He gave a fierce cry and bounded forward, Tyrning's gray edges rippling in the light. The high priest looked up at the cry and stared at Ragnarr with the hawk-like eyes of Minos.

At the same moment, priests, soldiers

and attendants faced toward the doorway with one accord, and a wild shout of anger rang out at the profanation of the sacrifice. Swords flashed from scabbards, tossing spears glinted in the torchlight, and the armed ranks pressed toward the stair, thrusting aside the women destined to be victims, whose terror-stricken shrieks and sobs filled the vast place with a pandemonium of horror.

"Tyr! Tyr!" cried the Northmen, and flung themselves into the hall with high-heaved weapons.

"Tyr!" rang out the voice of Ragnarr.

He leaped forward into the press and brought Tyrfling crashing into the shoulder of a bejeweled Cretan captain. Now Valgard stood at his side, his huge ax playing about his head. Short stabbing sword against heavy Gothic brand, javelin against broad-headed spear, the hostile ranks hacked and thrust and strove together.

For a little while the battle was doubtful; then, as more and more Northmen sprang from the passage into the sanctuary, the Cretans, fighting like bulls at bay, were pressed slowly back toward the dais, overturning and trampling the bound and screaming women. The slaughter was terrible, for both sides were packed close together, and the Cretans were jammed between the blood-maddened Northmen, the women, and the walls. Neither party had room to bend bows, and soon even spears were cast aside.

Sword, ax, and broad knives bit savagely. The greater numbers and crushing strength of the huge Northmen overwhelmed their lesser adversaries. The floor was slippery with blood; the rafters rang with shrieks and battle-cries. As the dead and dying fell and the Cretan ranks grew thin, the press became less dense and the din less frantic.

At last Ragnarr made his voice heard.

"Save the women!" he cried; and the Northmen answered with a ringing cheer.

Ulf of Wolfdale rushed forward with his company, Hakon the Strife-Ready led his heroes after, and both bands formed a cordon around the women, whose white robes were now splashed with blood.

Minos stood raging upon the dais, the unconscious body of Ilia still in his arms. He had been on the point of uttering the invocation to the sacrifice when Ragnarr's cry first burst upon his ears. As he saw his enemy before him, in his very sanctuary, a

furious resolve to complete the sacrifice laid hold of him.

He signaled to the priest whose duty it was to turn the lever that brought down the fatal arms and opened the fiery mouth of the Minotaur; but his assistant had already seized his ax and rushed forward to meet the invaders. Minos cried out in vain fury to the other priests, but all were in the conflict, fighting with desperation. He stood alone before the Minotaur; and every moment the fearful northern axes were falling closer and closer on the little band that stood between him and the wrath of Ragnarr.

The beaten priest-king laid his victim down at the feet of the Minotaur and ran swiftly to the end of the dais. He reached in behind a scarlet curtain, grasped the lever, and pulled it down with all his strength. The metal jaws of the monster opened, belching fire, and its ponderous arms descended upon its knees.

Minos rushed back, raised the inert form of Ilia, and held her upright between the cupped and parted brazen palms. As he released his burden, something glittered before his eyes, something hot and crushing smashed in upon his brain, and the blood poured over his face.

Ragnarr, casting his shield aside, had hewed and plunged through the thinning line of Cretan soldiery and reached the king's side just as Ilia was offered to the Minotaur's clasp. One stroke of Tyrfling had cut through the golden diadem and the royal head beneath; and, just as Ilia's weight released the spring that held apart the brazen arms, Ragnarr snatched her away and held her in his own.

Minos, wounded to death, reeled and staggered forward into the space between the Minotaur's knees, just as its cupped hands clashed together, catching him beneath the armpits with crushing force. Slowly, inexorably, the pitiless clutch bore him up and into the gaping, fiery mouth.

One instant he struggled back against its breath of flame, then the jaws shut with a ringing clang, and the Son of the Bull passed in splendor to his fathers. For the last time arose the prolonged, blood-chilling voice of the Minotaur.



VICTORIOUS Northman and doomed Cretan alike stood appalled at the catastrophe. At length, with a wail of terror, the last of the shattered

guardsmen broke and ran straight for the thinnest point in their foemen's line. With the desperation of frenzy they broke through the still staring conquerors, reached the passage, and fled shrieking through the labyrinth.

Ragnarr, clasping Ilia to his breast, gazed upon the bloody ruin before him. His warriors made no move to pursue the escaping Cretans. All stood silent and motionless, awestruck at a scene of horror such as none of them had dreamed before. Valgard was the first to rouse himself.

"It is done, master," he said in solemn tones. "Let us go back and bring the princess to the upper air."

He took a torch from the wall, lifted one of the bound women and signed to the other Northmen to follow his example. Still speechless, they obeyed; and slowly, gravely, the long line filed up the staircase, Valgard and Ragnarr leading.

As they worked their way back through the labyrinth, the close air of the passage brought with it wisps of smoke; and when they had come toward its outer end shouts of triumph and cries of stricken men reached their ears.

"It is Gorm and his fellows," Valgard muttered.

Now the night air already blew upon their foreheads; but it was thick with acrid smoke; and shot through with sparks.

"They have fired the palace!" Ragnarr cried in alarm. "Out, before it is too late!"

They hastened on, and at last came out upon the unroofed inner court. As they burst from the passage great clouds of smoke enveloped and choked them, and burning brands fell at their feet. Through the thick, fire-shot reek they could see forms hurrying through the court, some staggering beneath heavy burdens. The air was fearfully hot about them and seemed to scorch their hair and beards.

"The corridor!" Ragnarr gasped. "Air, or she will die!"

He ran in fevered haste along the western wall, reached the corridor at last and emerged on the portico, followed by the long stream of his men. Here, too, flaming brands and burning beam-ends fell about them.

"On!" Valgard urged his master, dragging him forward in a bear-like grip. "The girders are going! Any moment the roof will fall!"

They rushed into the great western court and down the hill on to the open plain. Here they stopped, set down the rescued women and unbound their arms.

Ragnarr turned and gazed back upon the blazing house of Minos. Out of its balconied windows poured twisting sheets of flame, outlining the mighty columns and cliff-like walls of limestone. A fearful radiance trembled over the plain, turning the Kairatos to a river of blood, reddening the hills beyond and flooding the pass with ruddy light. But the prince had little thought for its beauty. The men of Gorm—his men—were still inside, pillaging and sacking.

Laying Ilia on the grass, Ragnarr raised his horn and blew again and again. The Northmen, who had killed and plundered till the fire made it no longer possible, came tumbling out of the gates on all sides. Some bore vessels of gold and silver; some reeled beneath great wine-jars or heavy chests of arms; some carried huge vessels of stone, covered with gold leaf, between them. Others were laden with robes of costly fabrics, images of precious metals, or inlaid jewel caskets. Some had removed their mantles, stuffed them with loot and carried them, tied at the corners, over their shoulders.

At first the men of Gorm came out in a thick mass, then in a gradually thinning stream. As the last stragglers left the gates there came the grinding tear of straining roof-beams, a series of horrific crashes, and then, with a volcanic upward rush of flame and sparks, the vast flat western roof fell in. One after another the great limestone blocks of the eastern and northern roofs came plunging down as the rafters of the gods fall on the last great day.

The Northmen gathered on the plain and stared, fascinated, at the mighty conflagration.

"There falls the first and fairest homestead in all the world," old Valgard said, with an almost reverent solemnity.

"Ay, and I pray that none of our good fellows lie crushed within," Ragnarr answered.

"I do not see Rolf Red-ax here," Ulf spoke up. "Yet he was with us when we came down into the court."

"He ran into the great garth in the midst of the abode when I and my men were still pillaging," volunteered old King Gorm, who had come up to Ragnarr among the first.

"He found a jar of gold full of the costliest wine, and was tasting it. I called him, but he would not come."

"If he does not appear in the morning," Valgard grunted, "a brave and greedy man will have had a noble pyre."

Ragnarr sighed, and turned away.

"It is of no avail to seek him now," he answered. "To the ships!"

A mighty river of men rolled slowly toward the shore, heavily cargoes with booty. Ragnarr's Islanders bore the rescued women in their arms, changing burdens as they grew weary.

As Ragnarr strode on in the cool night air, still lit with the glow of burning Knossos, Ilia stirred faintly in his arms. Her fair face turned up to meet his, and a smile played over her lips. Slowly she reached up and touched his bearded face.

"Ragnarr!" she murmured, "Ragnarr!"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PASSING OF ARIADNE

IN THE last dark before the dawn the long procession billowed down the royal road to the shore, the Cretan women between two divisions of northern warriors. The women walked with the lifeless, unvaried pace of the utterly overwrought, looking straight before them with blank, expressionless faces. The nearness of terrible death, the shock and horror of slaughter and fire, had numbed their minds to expressionless acceptance of whatsoever might befall.

Ilia, still held close in Ragnarr's arms, was less shaken than the others. Her spirit was of a more heroic sort; moreover, having been unconscious throughout the fighting, it had not been crushed by the terrors that raged about her. None the less, her body was overcome with weariness, and after the first words of recognition she fell into the sleep of utter exhaustion, her head on Ragnarr's breast.

Ragnarr looked down upon her with exquisite tenderness, and ever and again touched his cheek against her soft, thick hair. His heart, so recently tossed by the storms of fear, of battle frenzy and conquest, was now full to overflowing with the joy of triumphant love. All the toil and suffering of the long months which had separated them had been swept away by his new-found happiness.

As he looked on the lovely face that he had not seen for so long the past vanished completely. Only the present seemed real to him, and the promise-laden years to come.

The years to come! Musing on the blessings they must bring, his mind suddenly recoiled before a terrible thought that pierced through his reverie like an arrow. His promise to Ariadne, which the events of the night had driven from his memory, rushed back upon him now as he bent over his new-found, hard-won Ilia, and shriveled his hope as a spring frost shrivels the young corn.

He stopped in full stride, and the burden in his arms seemed suddenly to weigh him down to earth.

For a moment, as hope and love struggled against this evil thought which threatened them, it came to his mind to do what he would with that which he had won. Ilia was his, Ariadne a prisoner on his ship.

He could repudiate his promise, made in an hour of mad helplessness, wed Ilia and make happiness his own. But this did not last. It was not in him to break his word. So long as he had lived he had kept his honor unstained, and he could not smirch it now. He was a king's son, and must act in a kingly way. With an effort that wrung his heart, he forced the tempting thought away, and bitterly resigned himself to the sacrifice.

As they reached the desolate port and sighted the forest of their masts beyond, the cheerless dawn broke upon the land. Each company sought its ship and bestowed the women aboard as comfortably as they could. Ragnarr summoned Valgard, Ulf and Gorm, and bade them see to it that their captives suffered no wrong.

"Give the men no wine," he admonished them sternly, "until we are well at sea, then keep them at work. If any break discipline, it is upon your heads."

Putting Ilia gently into Valgard's arms he gave orders for her lodging, and bade the old man let her sleep on undisturbed. Then Ragnarr walked swiftly up the shore, striding along the beach on the chill gray light, fighting his greatest battle out alone. Just before sunrise he came back to the landing and boarded the *Gray Wolf*, stern and silent.

He found Gorm, Valgard and Kamas awaiting him, as if seeking a consultation. Ragnarr looked at them questioningly.

Gorm's eyes were twinkling, and his right hand tugged at his white beard.

"You have shown us good sport, Prince Ragnarr," he began blithely, "and rich looting, as you promised. But where do we sail now?"

"Ay, where, master?" Valgard broke in. "Will you be going back to Gotland to become a rich farmer? For a king you will not be, having resigned the land to your brother. I do not think you were made to serve, and nought else remains back yonder."

Ragnarr looked from one to the other, comprehending but unready of speech. What should he say? It mattered little what became of him now.

Gorm spoke again, a strange warmth in his tones.

"Valgard is right, comrade. You were not born to serve. I think I have noticed a tenderness between you and the little lass you plucked from the arms of the fire-devil. Now do you sail with me to my land, take the half of it for yourself and her, and your children shall have it forever."

In spite of the pain Gorm's puzzling speech had given him, Ragnarr was deeply moved by the old man's generosity, and the real affection which it implied. But he shook his head and replied sadly:

"I would gladly accept your offer, old friend, but the gods have other things in store for me. Yet you are both right: I can not go back to my own land. I see nothing certain on my road; indeed, it seems that I must be a wanderer, seeking strange lands forever, and finding not that which I seek. The gods shall decide for me—where the wind blows, I follow."

As he spoke the morning breeze sprang up, blowing fresh from the southwest.

"A sign, my prince!" cried Kamas, his dark face gleaming. "The gods have answered! Raise the sail and let it carry you over the waters. Do you remember the city of the traders on the Euxine's eastern shore? It is peopled by men of your own race, who desert it during the cold Winter and set up their booths again when Spring unbinds the land. Let us go thither, build us dwellings of trees and found a mighty people. There you may reign over your own kingdom; your servants shall be enriched with the commerce of all the East; and the women who are with us shall become the mothers of a new race!"

Ragnarr's lips moved in a slow smile at

the Trojan's enthusiasm; but Gorm brought his vast palm down in delight on Kamas's shoulders.

"The little man has said well!" he shouted. "Up sails, and out oars!"

"Be it as you will," Ragnarr at last made answer. "The wind is the breath of the gods, and we will go whither it urges us."

Gorm, his ruddy face beaming, went over the side and was rowed to his own vessel. The news rang from ship to ship, and cheer on cheer burst from the deep chests of the sailors. The oars were thrust out and the stout galleys put out to sea. One after another they glided from the little harbor, and, spreading their sails, skimmed over the rippling waves like white-winged gulls.

Ragnarr stood by the mast looking over the starboard shield-rail. The sun was coming up redly, its fiery glow stained with the great drift of reek from the still smoking palace. His heart was bitter, but a new resolution kindled within him. Happiness was not for him; the rapture of love shared with the beloved could nevermore be his; but, please the gods, there was still work for him to do. And still slaying, doubtless; for in his life the two were one.

Musing, he drew Tyrning from its sheath, and gazed at the gray edges, still flecked with the blood of Minos. As he looked at the dull stains, all his old hatred for the dead sea-king surged back upon him, and he gripped the hard hilt in his strong fingers.

A light footfall on the planks, and Ariadne stood beside him. She was still clad in the gray gown of the merchant's daughter, and her hair, loose about her, waved in the breeze. Her cheeks were pale, and dark hollows showed beneath her eyes; but those eyes shone with a fierce radiance.

Ragnarr turned sharply toward her.

"You have no need to seek me," he said, his voice harshly savage. "You have bought me, and have paid well for your bargain. Look you my sword, stained with your father's blood, which you have helped me shed. See the smoke-clouds yonder, where the remnants of your people sit in the ashes of their ravaged city. All this you paid for love of me. Fear nothing; I keep my word. Tonight my mantle shall cover you and your father's slayer!"

Ariadne recoiled, her face white and distorted. She stared as if fascinated at the bloody sword, and then at the fierce face of the Northman. Her eyes grew wide with

horror, and her breath came in labored gasps.

She put her hands before her face, and when she took them away her features were stern and set, like those of her father. And now a new light burned in her eyes, a light cold and baneful, with no hint of love. She stood majestic, still a regnant queen.

"Barbarian!" she cried. "Wolf of the waters! Think you that I could take the hand that shed the blood of Minos? Do you dare dream that I could love a savage, glorying in his destruction of a mighty empire, which cast the brightness of civilization over all the lands of the earth?"

"And out of *your* lips, for which I gave all, I am condemned! Yet it is true; your hands are no redder than my own. It was I, it was I, who betrayed my father and brought ruin on my land, even as you say. I, the daughter of Minos, guided the sword that struck him down. I am Scylla, the traitress, scorned by men and cursed of the gods!"

Ragnarr, frightened by her passion, attempted to comfort her, but she thrust him back.

"No!" she cried. "Like Scylla I have lived, and like Scylla I will die. Yet, even now, I will not stoop to the embraces of a sea-thief. See, barbarian, how a king's daughter ends!"

Before he could stop her, Ariadne sprang forward, rushed to the very prow and mounted the gunwale. There, drawing a jeweled dagger from beneath her robe she drove the bronze blade into her breast, threw up both arms and fell headlong into the sea.

Urged by the breeze the *Gray Wolf's* forefoot glided over the foam where the waves had received her.

 DUMB with horror, Ragnarr stared into the blue depths. A little choking sob broke in upon his tortured spirits. He turned quickly and found himself face to face with Ilia. Her eyes were dry and wide, her lips were parted, and her face was pale with grief and fright.

For a long moment the two looked at each other, so that it would be hard to say which was the more shaken by the tragedy. Ragnarr's blue eyes gazed deep into her piteous brown ones, each seeking comfort in the other's face. At last, without knowing when or how it happened, they found them-

selves in each other's arms. Beside them the sparkling water raced along the *Gray Wolf's* side, caressing its timbers and reaching up white fingers of spray as if in tenderness. Above great gulls wheeled and soared across the cloudless sky, ever and again breaking into a swift dive, like plumed arrows shot into the sea.

In spite of themselves the lovers were wooed by the wine-like air and the vivid beauties of sky and sea, till their great affection swelled into irresistible fulness, thrusting out the thought of death and pain from their hearts. Slowly the light of happiness grew within them, and they surrendered to their love.

AFTERWORD

THIS is the tale of the ruin which fell on glorious Knossos, long sung among the people of the Euxine shores. Ragnarr, the godlike conqueror, lived many and happy years in his new-founded kingdom; but the saga of his mighty deeds, of his death, and the part played therein by the great sword Tyrning must be told by another singer.

It is enough to say that that marvelous blade, forged by the chance discovery of a forgotten smith, from a metal elsewhere for many centuries unknown, descended according to the law of its being, till the curse laid on it wore away. Dying father bequeathed it to heroic son, till at last a woman, the grim daughter of a northern berserk, took it with her on her journey to the wild gods of Valhall.

In those later days, yet before the sword passed from among men, the descendants of Ragnarr spread their conquests from the capital of a new Eastern empire to the shores of the Atlantic. Their bards sang the Song of the Sword in the halls of Roman Cæsars, and men have said that the gray blade was for a time in the possession of their mightiest prince—Theodoric the Goth.

The winds of many Winters swept the ruined courts of Knossos, and the red-prowed galleys no longer sought the harbors of the southern world. No messenger came from Crete to tell of the swift destruction. Her unsigned treaty lay in the halls of Thebes, till the lapse of time and the absence of news brought to Pharaoh the certainty of disaster.

The daughter of Amenoths married her

royal uncle, and their descendants ruled over upper and lower Egypt. At last the useless block on which the treaty had been carved was shorn of its inscription and cut into two pieces, which now form part of the stately tomb wherein lies buried Rekh-mara, the wise minister of Amenothès.

But it was long before the Egyptians forgot the splendor of Minos and the richly-laden merchant ships of Crete. In Rekh-mara's costly tomb one may still see a great mural painting, depicting the men of the

Isles of the Sea, with their strange, pinched waists, their delicate features, and the lavish gifts of tribute which they bore to Amenothès.

Most prominent in the painted procession are the figures of Ambrogeos, the son of Minos, and the great Cretan admiral, Rhodonthos. For many years the dwellers on the Nile pondered on the fate of Knossos, spoke of its mighty fleets, and mourned the dark time when "over the very green sea the ships of the Keftiu came no more."

THE END

SONG OF ILIA

BY RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

MY HEART was like a hyacinth,
 The flower of ten thousand Springs;
 But, Daedalus, your labyrinth
 Has caught it in its seventh fold
 And soon the Minotaur will hold
 And crush it till it withers cold.
 The flower of ten thousand Springs——
 Oh, give it, Daedalus, your wings!



The World Next Door

William Dudley Pelley

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THIS is a true thing: The only person you are positive of knowing is yourself!

Your neighbor may have assassinated a Russian grand duke; the man who reads the titles aloud in the movies beside you may have fed his wife's mother arsenic, being guilty of anything. Even the wife whose head lies next you on the pillow may have a secret that even death will not release. Yes, if the hearts of the best of us were opened for the running world to read, how different would the world's cynosure be!

Hammered-down, shag-hatted, frayed-coated "Old Shep" leaned over the garden fence and spat in my rose-bushes. The little weaver awaited the dreary toot of the six-thirty whistle which would summon him to all-night slavery in a carbon-lighted hell of gnashing knives and dizzy bobbins.

"It's a world of ennui," I declared to Shep, not thinking of these sentiments above. I was clipping my rose-bushes to work off the mulligrubs and a general attack of faulty circulation.

"Meanin' what?" asked Old Shep.

"All the world's a stage," said I, "and men and women in it mostly supers. Life is one—rainy day after another. Chivalry opens one to ridicule; romance is dead. Adventure consists chiefly of reading war reports and great battles fought by soldiers whose bloodthirst demonstrates they have never been off Manhattan Island.

"We are born, let us say, in a little country town. Destiny decrees we go unwept, unhonored and unhung. So we obey destiny; follow the even tenor of our way. Presently we are only a wooden packing-case in a vault, waiting for the frost to leave the ground in the Spring. We are fish in a pool, endlessly and uneventfully swimming round and round. Finally we will be jerked into eternity on the barb of death, holiday sport for gods!"

Mrs. Old Shep, a buxom woman of fifty, always hot and sweaty under a heavy roll of hair—with whom "going down-town" was a weekly ceremony—finished her supper dishes and threw the water into the garden. For thirty years probably she had done it. She would do it for thirty more. Then relatives would send flowers; a reporter with dandruff on his collar would write her life in two sticks; a granite-cutter would dun Old Shep eighteen months for the headstone.

"Look at yourself," I continued, "slaving till your death—a mill-hand for sixteen per week. Look at me, driven into nausea by bellicos editors battling for the chance to pay me ten cents a word for my stuff when they know the sight of blood always sickens me, anyhow. You'll die at your loom without seeing the Brooklyn Bridge. I'll perish miserably of ingrowing brains, late hours, and too much lobster *à la* cash-roll."

"Well," replied Old Shep, watching his seventh son attempt construction of a

trolley-car with a broken tack-hammer and foot of old scythe, "it's better than the trenches, anyhow. But I know how you feel, and it's dangerous. Men have done things to affect the destiny of nations while in your mood. For instance, you would hardly believe that a fellow feeling that way resulted in Great Britannia annexing the Sudan. But I knew him well and it's a logical fact. It's quite a story."

I leaned against the fence and used Old Shep to gaze upon.

"What do you know about the Sudan?" I demanded.

"Quite a bit," he replied modestly. "I helped smash it on the nose!"

"Have you ever been outside Bennington County in your life?" I cried astonished.

Clod-footed little Shep smiled wanly. Again he cuspidored in my General Jacqueminots. Leaning over the back fence in the Vermont Summer afterglow, he told me this story.



IT WAS a dreamy London night when young Roger Snauson came to my room. He sat down on my bed and put his face in his hands.

"Shep," says he, "my character's considered good, ain't it? I've worked hard, lived temperate, kept away from the lights and the women."

"You have," says I.

"Shep," says he, "the Summer night's got into me. I'm going mad with loneliness and the monotony of the life I've been living. I'm ripe to do something rash."

"All you need, son," says I, "is a woman. Being a successful orphan, you're living too much in yourself. A little moderate wild oats is a good thing for a man. They put a few high lights into the drabs of life. Go kick over the traces for a week. Get something to think about except how sober and steady a chap you are."

I said it unthinking, never dreaming where the reaction would take him. A man in his condition runs to extremes both in sobriety and sinfulness.

"Yes," said he, "you're right, Shep. I've been good all my life and I'm nothing but melancholy and blue. The world is a dreary succession of sleep, work, grub and sleep. I'm going to cut loose for one week, let it take me where it will. I'm just that blue and bellicose I don't care where I end or what becomes of me."

With that, he went out.

I didn't see anything more of him until the night before I was to pack up my things and start with my regiment for the Sudan.

He came again to my room.

Believe me, neighbor, he was some changed. His face was white, his body was thin, his eyes were hunted. He resembled a rat that had escaped a trap by leaving a few inches of perfectly worthless tail—but escaped, anyhow.

"Shep," says he, "there's trouble in Africa, ain't there? The army's been ordered out, what? They ship tomorrow don't they?"

"Yes," says I, wondering what had happened.

"For the first time in the last six months," says he, "I don't regret enlisting."

"Have you enlisted?" I cries at him.

"I have," says he. "I'm going with you, although I'm not in your company."

"What the devil have you turned soldier for?" says I.

He shambles over and falls on my bed exactly in the place and way he'd fallen nine months before and held his face in his hands.

"Shep," says he, "you're a friend of mine, aren't you?"

"To a reasonable degree," says I.

"Then listen!" he pleaded desperate-like.

"If there's a woman comes to these quarters between now and tomorrow noon tell her—I've gone on ahead. Sudden orders," says he. "You'll know her by her hair. It's black as night, and if it was loosened, it would fall to her knees. You can't mistake her. Anyhow, she'll be asking for me. In the meantime I'm going to—keep out of sight," he says.

"Roge," says I, "you've been misbehaving!"

"I suppose so, Shep," says he. "You remember the night last Summer I came in here desperate with the monotony of life? Well, I went out and I—found a woman. She was a housemaid. I picked her up in a park. I started to flirt at first, always having denied myself the luxury of such doings. But it got serious, Shep, that is, on her side.

"I don't love her, Shep. I couldn't. She ain't the kind of woman I want to marry. I just picked her up because I was bound to raise the devil to break the monotony of sleep, work, grub, sleep. When I see there

was no shaking her off," says he, "well, I enlisted. Now, thank Providence, there's to be a scrap that will give me excuse for getting out of the country for a spell till it blows over with her."

"Roger," says I, "do you call that playing the man?"

"Shep," says he, "do you want me to marry a woman I don't and can't love?"

I shook my head.

"If you've been indiscreet," says I, "and gone too far with this business you'll have to get some one else to do your lying. I'm a moral man, I am, Roge. There's knobs of morality sticking out on my liver like boils. Emerson says a man can have anything he wants if he'll pay the price. If you've been getting value received, don't trim your creditor—especially if she's a woman."

He fiddled some with his mustache

"Do you know why I can't love her, Shep? I'll tell you. She's the kind whose idea of loving a man is to let him whale the eternal tar out of her, beat her, desert her. And in return she'll let her heart bleed out, drop by drop, for him. You know the kind, Shep—follow a man all over the world and live with him in a hovel only to be near him. I want one with more backbone, Shep. Oh you don't understand! You don't understand," he says.

"What, man!" I gasps. "Have you found a girl like that—and are you running away from her? You're a stark, raving lunatic! They don't raise that breed any more in these days, son," says I.

"She's so sentimental she's fair disgusting," says he.

Right there I had no further use for Roger Snawson. He turned a side of his character to me that showed he was yellow.

"Man," says I, "black both her eyes, slam her in the nose, kick her shins, take her into the street and hammer her head on the asphalt, but don't take French leave of that kind of lady and ever come back expecting to find her again in the market. If I can get her address I'll take after her myself," says I. "Give the lady the exquisite pleasure of a fair-well, affectionate beating-up," I says, "but either pay your connubial debts like a man or take your medicine," says I. "Don't expect me to take up your case with the kind of woman who can love like that."

We had words, which don't matter to

repeat now. He got out and we parted the best of enemies.

At six o'clock, as he said, came the woman.

If Mother Eve had been given half as much hair, birds would never have been created with feathers for mattresses. And if Eve had let it fall without hairpins the ladies would have been wearing Lady Godiva peek-a-boos to this day, clothes never having been necessitated.

And she was pretty, neighbor, in a sad, melancholy sort of way. The form of her too, was plump and mellow and made to be thought much of.

It ain't necessary to tell you what she said except that Snawson had promised to marry her. I learned with relief that both of them had kept an eye to the proprieties. But the sentimental limits that connected her to him were boundless.

"Madam," says I, "what if you found out that Roger had a yellow streak as wide as Piccadilly?"

"What do you mean?" says she.

"Oh, nothing," says I.

A while afterward she went out. Roger Snawson was my mortal enemy. I went on with my packing to give my hands something to do.



DO YOU know much about the history of England in the Sudan? No?

Well, around the year eighteen-seventy, Queen Victoria takes to sitting up in bed and throwing her hairbrushes round her imperial apartments. She wanted a certain section of country on the eastern side the Sahara. That's the Sudan. She was growing real peevish in her covetousness.

There was an oldish chap kicking round the War Office whose name was General Something-or-other. He was suddenly turned loose in lower Egypt to show the army where to stick a British flag in the sands and tell the inhabitants to go suck ostrich eggs.

After the army had argued the thing out with dum-dum bullets that left holes the size of parlor lamps in the black inhabitants, the said negroes took the thing philosophically. For several years they married, gave in marriage and rode behind the undertaker's horse real peaceable and Saxon-like and the general was decorated with a something-or-other.

In eighteen-seventy-four the sand-heaps needed another governor to keep England's bluff good. General Gordon got a diploma to go down there, make a semi-annual report on the export trade, get sunstroke, drink much bunk beverage and possibly earn his salary. While the shifting was going on, the black men got into a scrap, knocked the sand thrones from under a couple of native kings and messed up things so generally that Gordon no sooner got there than he was wired for in a hurry.

Britannia thought a lot of General Gordon, but it wasn't one-half of what General Gordon thought of himself when he saw the atmosphere lying around in chunks where it had been sliced up by native simitars. He answered the telegram in person and came home in such a hurry the queen wasn't expecting him and was caught in her kimono.

Immediately the Sudanese were the plunder of Turks, Circassians and Bashi-Bazouks who waded into the population to see them scatter. There was religion mixed in the thing, which was bad—and English politics, which was worse.

Finally the queen got mad at the way the negroes were kicking England's shins and pulling her nose. She tucked a rolling-pin under her hoop-skirt and sashayed forth to interview the army.

"Look here," says she to a regiment of generals, "for what am I givin' you fellers board, rooms and free washin'? Shake a leg! Get down into Egypt and take the whalebone stays out of this Mohammed Ahmed who's wrapped the idea into his turban that he's the whole blooming cheese because the only Englishmen he's seen is stuffed uniforms like yourselves. Swipe him; paste him; mop up the Sahara with him and send me a photo of the horizon afterward to prove you've done it," says she, "but *do it!*"

Growing nervous about headquarters was a chap named Kitchener. He was so savage they muzzled him in the cradle. When grown, you knew he was approaching because the horizon grew dark. He was the sort who would not give the order to cease firing until the enemy had ceased to be.

"Kitch," says the queen, "can you soak this nigger's soul in propriety and orderliness, or will I have to do it myself?" says she. "Can you sashay into those tropical regions and make of him hash?" says she.

"Or will he continue to contaminate the army with disaster until I have to call in an osteopath for my nerves," she says.

"I can, madam," says Kitch. "Shall I wash my hands or wear gloves?"

"Sail into 'em with recklessness and self-confidence, Kitch," says she. "Investigate their bowels with machine-guns and frightfulness. But don't sponge any more on England's martial bounty until you've got this Mahdi chap corrected in his misunderrandin' and walkin' round in dazed circles," she says.

"I'm on, madam," says he, "as soon as I've fixed up my Kitchen cabinet."

And he was. That's how I was going along to help. That's how Roger Snawson was leaving Daisy Mayme with tears in her eyes as the transport pulled out without Snawson playing the man.

But Snawson hadn't seen the last of her, for I remarked, neighbor, that Snawson had said she was the kind to follow the man she loved all over the world and live with him in a hovel.

Daisy Mayme proceeded to live up to her one-woman-in-a-thousand nature.



NOW folks will tell you that the real battle that put the Sudan forever into the hands of the English was Khartum. Don't you believe it. I was there and I know.

The real turning-point in the campaign was fought several weeks before, but I won't give you its name because you'll write it up for your paper and get me in wrong.

There again folks will tell you it was won by the English. Again they are wrong. It was won by a woman and that woman was Daisy Mayme. See how the thing worked: First Roger's streak of blues, same as you was just mulligrubbing about; then his flirtation with a woman who took him seriously; then her following him to the desert; then the turning battle influenced by her; the back of the revolt broken by that battle; England's victory over the blacks—and everybody living happily ever after.

I tell you, neighbor, England owns the Sudan because Roger Snawson had the blues. Wait till you hear the end and tell me if I ain't logical.

We pushed across the desert and camped almost in sight of the outposts of negroes. The men were in that surly, high-strung

mood that always goes ahead of a scrap. I won't say the place was Obdurman, but it was mighty near it. Let it go at that. You want the story, not geography.

I'm no poet, neighbor, and maybe I'll end my days in a dazzling room of shining knives and reeling bobbins. But there's no forgetting how the desert looked that morning in late September. The sky rose round us like a turquoise bowl with cracks in its bottom through which great streaks of stars shone through. Out of the stillness came a breath of icy wind. Talk of Vermont's cold winters! Go dress in a string of beads and a smile and stand in the Sahara desert an hour before sunrise.

I couldn't sleep any more than the rest of the boys. I walked to the edge of the camp where I could look off over the great engulfing desert. A moon had risen at one. And it wasn't the cold silver plate we have up here in the Green Mountains. It was a moon that owned the sky, the earth and the waters beneath the earth. It was a great mellow radiance that made the vastness and the awfulness of that desert as titanic as the solar world itself—of which it was a dried and barren atom.

Suddenly behind a bunch of camel-thorn I heard a shout.

Over a rise of ground appeared a moving object. In uncanny silhouette against the sky I saw it was a solitary camel. It carried two people, a man and a woman. It was the Bisharin, light-weight riding camel and down on the camp it moved swiftly.

It's easy to stand here over this fence and say that the solitary camel held a woman. You don't appreciate what a woman meant out in that place at such a time of night, with a ghastly battle impending on the morrow and the country ravished by bands of cutthroats, chopping folks to slivers in the name of politics and religion.

But that camel held a woman. Coming straight to where I was, it stopped.

I couldn't talk with the surprise of it. I could only stand there like a fool and gasp.

Sullen and defiant, the driver made his camel kneel. From the saddle, reeling with fatigue, the female staggered. In her hand was an ugly business-meaning pistol. And in that great moonlight her face was white as chalk.

Instantly the animal was up and away with a great roar, down the wind.

Daisy Mayme and myself were alone!

She was enveloped in a great-coat that the devil only knows where she got. Her hat was gone—if she'd ever had one—and the breaking motion of the camel across those trackless miles of desert had unleashed her ravenous hair. Like a great wild phantom she appeared in the magnifying night-light.

I won't take up time telling our conversation. I needn't explain how she'd followed us, slipped out across the desert by bribing a quaking thief of a driver, hit by one chance in a thousand just where we were camping and one chance in a million just where I—her friend—was standing.

The point was, she wanted to be near Roger if he should die next day.

There was a preposterous argument between us. Then as there was nothing to do, I sneaked her through the camp to where Snawson was lying, too frightened to sleep. The sleepless men fell from before us with blank faces, and sagging jaws. The woman in the time and place was uncanny. With her tremendous hair wafting out behind her she looked like some strange two-footed beast I had captured in the desert.



THOSE who have waited in the desert for morning know how the last hour before the light lengthens in an eternity; before a battle, terrible and nerve-breaking.

We knew all right what would happen with the rising of the sun. We knew the blacks had rigged up the most delightful of horrors for a soldiery already sickening for home—a dawn attack on the troops. We knew they were somewheres out in the moony shadows, a-waiting for us, for when the hours had dragged away and the moon grown pale, chance shots at moving objects outside the square, put us wise they were getting the range.

You never saw morning dawn on a desert. I can't describe it. No one ever has. All they've been able to do is puddle round in simile and metaphor and locate it outdoors somewhere with sand under foot.

First there's scattered white baby clouds that appear out of nowhere. They form in long banks that hang heavy in the ghastly stillness of the dawn. After a time they roll down gently into the valleys and a weird grayness tints the world. Then the stars shrink out; the horizon takes fire; the sun flares suddenly over the horizon as if

shot from a catapult on a distant planet. The icy cold is gone; the day has come while you've been on your knees cussing at a strap that won't buckle.

But if you want to appreciate a desert dawn go watch the moon wash out and the stars grow pale lying on your knotty blanket in a dank sweat because you know that before another group of morning cloud-banks form, half the men about you may be watching the waning moon with glassy eyes and hideous yellow hands that claw in the sand and grasp—nothing!

That was the day that dawned with Daisy Mayme in the camp. The boys were coughing and swearing. The range shots increased. Now and then one of them struck a camel. He roared and leaped to his feet, getting his throat cut as reward for his temperment. Then came a thick sob of a man who was shot. It's a queer sound a man makes as he gets his death-wound.

Neighbor, I could describe that battle in a way to make you sick.

The first we knew, came a wild, fanatical yell; the flight of a sortie of horsemen; cries of agony; roaring of more camels; the sudden deadly tat of machine-guns whipping out a blood-red fusillade to break the all-night silence. Then an earth-vibrating boom from the heavier artillery shot a half-mile funnel of smoke at the distance—the day's unspeakable business began.

Was it any wonder I forgot Daisy Mayme from London? Nor did I think of her again until I encountered Roger Snawson, white-faced and bloody, peering over an embankment of sand.

"Where's the woman?" I yelled above the maddening chaos of the increasing battle.

"I don't know," says he.

He didn't say it that way. He made the motions of it with his ashen-gray face. I've seen many men under fire for the first time. I never saw one so green with mortal terror as this chap who'd joined the army to get rid of a woman and found himself suddenly in the midst of a soldier's business.

About us the battle increased. Clouds of smoke arose, heavy and pungent, over sandy rises and down in the hollows. The air was a bedlam of explosions and frightful death in every roar.

Men cursed at the smoke-banks which clogged their vision, moving ever further and further out to get the range beyond.

13.

Behind fallen camels, behind the sand-hills, in some hideous places behind the inert bodies of already slaughtered comrades, crazy men with iron grimness on their faces, bent hard against the kick of their rifles. Out farther and farther the horde of us pressed to the long rolling streams of white that showed the galloping enemy.

As the sun rose higher, the hell of it increased. The smoke grew thicker, the din wilder. Sorties of white-clad cavalry rode horse and camel straight in the mouth of our shot and shell. Shrill fanatical cries were mingled with the death and confusion. Long pointed guns spat butchery and destruction into our faces. The animals on both sides were crazed with confusion.

Time and again we advanced. Time and again we fell back. Hillock by hillock the valleys and open spaces took great toll of human life; the desert sands were dyed for rods with great brown scars of mortal blood.

In the wake of that belching convulsion, men flopped in agony upon those sands like trout wrenched from a hook and tossed upon the shore. You could breathe iron in the very air. Don't tell me there isn't a hell. I have crawled through it, neighbor, a yard at a time.

As noon drew on, the sands became hot like a mammoth griddle, strewn with grit. The sunlight dazzled its blinding shafts on bayonets, swords and lances. It gleamed in the glassy eyeballs of the dead and dried bloody cakes of gore and sand upon their yellow faces.

Cavalry charges mutilated living bodies; cowards crawled unhurt amid the slaughtered; round and round, in and out, through the purple of the battle-cloud flashed the desert men—and our far-flung line held firm!



SHORTLY after one o'clock the Khalifa withdrew his shattered forces. He began massing for another terrific stroke upon that khakied wall of British.

I stood on a dune near the left flank. A great gun convulsed at my right, and before the smoke lifted I heard the sandy rush of a thousand horses' feet.

What happened next is confusion and purple darkness. When I opened my throbbing eyes the battle was far to the right in front.

But hiding in a dune beside me was Snawson. He lay in the protection afforded, shaking with ague.

Then I saw Daisy Mayme.

Where she had been and how she had lived through the hellfire of those two attacks only the devil can answer. Her great-coat was gone. The face and hands of her were bloody. The waist was torn from her throat, leaving the snow-white breast bloody bare to the deathly heat.

Over the rear of the carnage she crept along like a ghoul of the battle, fantastic hair trailing behind her. Half-running and crouching she reached young Roger's side.

"You're wounded!" says she and made a piteous cry.

But Roger was not wounded. Coward to the core, he was lying safe under lee of an embankment, feigning to have been hit and waiting the slaughter to end.

She bent above him, and mad with the terror of the Things lying in contorted positions about him, he recoiled with an oath and struck her.

And in exactly the moment he got her, a bullet got him. Yes sir—made a hole through him like bargain-day in a meat shop.

Mark how little things happen: If that bullet had gotten him three seconds before she bent above him, she'd probably have fallen over him with a broken heart and the night chills or first sand-storm placed a period right here in her story. But before that chunk of lead had messed his cosmos around the place he struck her, and in the blow she learned the manner of man he was. It was nothing but a white-livered coward whom she had followed into the desert. And in the measure she loved him did the same amount of reaction come, and swing the other way, and end.

So Roger Snawson died.

Friendless and alone in the blistering, shot-swept hell the girl reeled upward and realized her position.

The whole eastern skyline became an inferno. Gray smoke, smeared with scarlet-yellow slashes, hung in the breezeless sunshine, loath to rise and disclose the tragedies it hid. Bullets whistled through the upper air in pauses between the artillery with the swishing sound of gentle wheat blowing in the lazy Summer fields back home.

But the bellowing of camels, unearthly

shrieks of mortally wounded horses, intermittent booming of heavy guns, always drowned them out. Neighbor, take my word for it—war is all your Sherman said it is, only language failed him.

Daisy Mayme staggered up from the skewed thing bleeding his life away upon the sand.

But there were no bullets for her, neighbor. Though she stood with her hands thrown up in agony, her chest bare, wild hair falling rakishly behind, there was no such kindly fate.

What became of her?

From the corpse of the coward at her feet she looked at the masses of negroes forming and reforming, plunging forward, driven backward, round and round, in and out, as they slowly drove a wedge in the British columns, which were faltering. The reckless bravery of the convulsing masses of white men facing that slaughter with faces of steel, kindled an exultant fury in her jet-black eyes. I saw. I was watching her—fascinated.

Then she laughed, a long, shrill laugh, hysterical, blood-curdling. Beating her naked breast, she stumbled forward as the blacks were slowly and surely getting the best of it.

Behind the dune a black camel had come to a halt after losing its rider and returning from the hellish mêlée unhurt. Among the hundreds of common camels there had been two black beasts with the regiment, prize animals, as the black camel usually is, ridden by two of the general staff.

I don't know what went on in Daisy's mind. Maybe it was suicide. Maybe it was an insane desire to ride out into that inferno and contribute her small, poor support to the aid of the brave men fighting so desperately for a victory. Anyhow, there was the camel. He would carry her out into the great tangent where the issue was in titanic doubt.

Although she was an amateur in chauffeuring a camel, she brought him down and somehow got upon his back. I can't tell you how she did it. No one knows how anything happens in the upheaval of battle.

No man ever beheld a wilder sight than girl and beast presented. The upper half of her was naked; the great mass of hair sailed out behind her; she had picked up a dead man's saber from the sand and over the dead and dying, over the dunes and

hollows, into the battle-cloud she rode in hysterical laughter.

No bullets found that wild nude breast of Daisy Mayme. Far out into that wild tangent she rode, and, uninjured still, was lost to view.

Then the guns suddenly stopped. I couldn't stand it, though I was wounded. I had to know what was transpiring out in front. I got another man's helmet to keep off the sunstroke. I shambled, staggered, reeled forward.

The guns and the flying attacks of the black chaps had stopped. At the climax of battle a wild, unearthly shout arose from their ranks. Round and round an object they were circling, and our men had forgotten to charge from puzzled bewilderment.

I got on a dune, unmindful of death. I saw the whole thing.

A moment more and the aspect of the desert men had changed. Their hawkish darts upon our front were gone. They were restraining their animals and forming in semblance of orderly rank. Over the plain was suddenly raised the Mohammedan's song triumphant.

In the critical moment of the battle, with victory in the balance, down on our men they moved in one deadly, terrifying, singing mass.

High in the van was Daisy Mayme!

Seeking death, she had gone beyond the pale of our troops. No bullet finding her, the camel uncontrolled had carried her straight into the maw of the enemy. High above that mêlée she was carried forward by the mass of brown men, turned about, and the whole army—every last mother's son of them—was headed straight for us, singing a wild chant of victory.

It was no more marvel to the brown men—that out on the battle-hot desert, mounted on a great black camel, had suddenly ridden a near-nude white woman with oceans of hair streaming over her and covering her nudity—than to our own. Think of it! Scores of miles from any known white woman, this apparition had appeared at the head of the Mahdist's columns, leading them on to triumph or fearful destruction.

So astounded were our men that their wits seemed to desert them. But it was only for a moment. A great shudder passed over the ranks of the conquering hosts advancing.

Thus the battle reached its climax.



ALMOST at the first terrific volley of renewed firing the woman on the black camel—went down.

In the maw of that juggernaut of artillery a great cry broke from those thousands of throats when they realized the woman had fallen.

The blacks turned. They fled in disgraceful retreat.

Then, and then only, after them broke the English. The firing stopped, for the blacks fled as they never had fled before. Over the swaying, dizzy sands the boys pursued them for a day and a night without catching up. But that doesn't count. What made the black men turn and run—give us the battle—the instant the fantastic girl was brought down?

We didn't know then, but we weren't long in finding out.

In the year six hundred and fifty-something, a place over there in the sand-country called Basa was the scene of a similar scrap known as the Battle of the Camel. In this battle Ayeshah, wife of Mohamed, headed the triumphant charge mounted on one of these beasts.

Down through the ages Arab hosts were supposed to be led by a phantom girl mounted on a black camel, singing songs of encouragement to her side and insult to the other. According to the strict rules of the game to the Mohammedan, her capture, fall or death meant that there was no chance of the black men winning—that the heavenly hosts had so decreed—while in the event of victory, she led the triumphant march.

Now do you see why a man with the blues, a girl in the desert, her appearance in this unearthly form in the Mahdist ranks, and her fall from a place at their head warning them that Heaven was against their victory, took out the nerve from the blacks and broke the back of that revolt?

Kitchener attacked Khartum and thrashed the eternal tar out of it. But don't you suppose every blessed negro knew before he fired a shot in defense that the Mahdist cause was lost? Why shouldn't Kitchener win—with the gods behind him?

And all because Roger Snawson grew tired of behaving himself and longed for frightfulness and adventure. Son, stick to your rose-bushes.



OLD SHEP finished speaking.

Over on their rear porch Mrs. Shep brought out a chair, wiped her perspiring brow with her apron, sat down with a light something-or-other thrown over her shoulders to scan through the *Evening Banner*.

"Oh rats, Shep," said I, "your story has a tragic ending. I was almost on the point of declaring it would be a capital yarn for the magazines. But the unhappy ending is barred. You've killed the girl!"

"Huh!" said Old Shep. He took out his quid and added it to the fertilization of my Jacqueminots aforesaid. "No, son," he

added, "Daisy Mayme was badly wounded, but she didn't die. I found her out there on the desert."

"And what became of her?"

"She learned to love another man in time—which she followed all over the world and learned to live with—in a hovell! It does look like a hovel, don't it? The back porch roof needs fixing but I'm going to have it painted in the Spring, and I own it clear—without a mortgage!"

The whistle in the distance tooted for six-thirty.

Oh the world next door—the world that we little, little know!



Author of "Burning Mountain," "The World's End," etc.

SIX HOURS out of Eureka, the steamship *Hanalei* already made hard way of it. Indeed, to those who handled her, her conduct approached perversity, and was not altogether to be accounted for by the weather. She mounted the seas that rose under her bows slowly and unwillingly; plunging into the hollows, she creaked and groaned resentfully all along her keel; caught in the trough of occasional cross-seas, she wallowed unmanageably. The vanishing furrow that she constantly plowed was a crooked one.

She was an old and cranky craft, and always gave her helmsmen much trouble. But this trip it was worse, as if she knew what was ahead of her, and tried to dodge it.

Still, with all her bucking, her high freeboard kept her decks dry. Toward night most of the passengers that were not berth-bound came out to view an unfamiliar-

looking world. The sun, a remarkably diminished ball of lurid light, hung just above the horizon. All around it spread an unnatural coppery glow. The gray sky above was alive with flying scud; astern of the *Hanalei* a mad drift of smoke from her fore-castle eddied and whirled; ahead a dark mass of clouds rested on the sea like a menace. The waters themselves were a black, tumultuous waste, broken here and there by white flashes of foam. The already high wind was rising rapidly. But the season was the early Fall, and there was little bite to it.

The barometer, the word trickled from the bridge, was very low and going lower.

Amidship on the port side, John Lowden regarded the weather with mild speculation in his candid blue eyes. He was a man approaching middle age, with quite ordinary features. The uneasy way he braced himself against the motion of the ship betrayed

the landsman. His large, powerful hands were suggestive of much hard work, but at present they were uncalledous. His status was more definitely fixed by a neat but inexpensive gray business suit.

Presently he half turned from the rail and glanced forward. A slim girl with a slight limp, and a very bright, vivacious face, was laughingly struggling toward her stateroom. A young man who had already passed Lowden twice was continuing his constitutional under difficulties—he walked at a great pace, reeling from scupper-way to cabin. A gray-headed, nattily uniformed marine sergeant followed him, swinging along with perfect equilibrium. Lowden followed his easy progress with interest. The sergeant passed a young couple clinging to the rail, and to each other, and John's gaze embraced them for the first time on the trip.

Plainly he received such a shock as does not come often in the course of a lifetime.

His face whitened and twitched until it became like blown paper, and then slowly hardened into granite. His tightened clutch anchored him solidly to the weather-rail; his whole body tensed until he stood, with a scowling brow and hard-set jaw, like a sculptor's conception of a most primitive and deadly emotion. Only his eyes—which it is said reveal the soul of a man—remained steady and steadfast and mostly unchanged.

"Easy, easy!" he muttered to himself after a full minute. "Be sensible. Be sensible!"

He stood stock still for a while longer, and when he finally started forward no sign of his agitation remained but a slight pallor.

When he was half-way to the couple, the *Hanalei* began a series of crazy wallowings. Lowden grasped a convenient brace and waited patiently for better footing. The girl, laughing with a note of wildness, was flung around to face him, and their eyes met.

The laugh died away as if snatched from her lips. Her brilliant eyes widened with an indescribable expression of fear, changing rapidly into petulant anger. Her sudden rigidity warned her companion, who looked over her shoulder with alarm in his strikingly handsome and youthful face.

This alarm, however, passed into a blank, unrecognizing stare as Lowden approached. Lowden removed his hat formally and spoke to the girl with a smile.

"This is luck, Alice," he said easily. "I didn't expect to meet you here."

The girl caught her breath and looked at him doubtfully, her full lips rather apart, her delicately rounded figure poised defensively. Then she copied his calmness with an effort, drew back, and murmured conventionally—

"Mr. Cranston, Mr. Lowden."

Both men bowed slightly.

"Perhaps Mr. Cranston will excuse you for a moment," said Lowden, looking from one to the other tentatively. "I'm the bearer of good news, as it were——"

The girl hesitated and then yielded to the suggestion of Lowden's firm touch on her elbow. But when they had withdrawn a few paces, she stopped and flashed upon him a look she tried hard to make contemptuous.

"This is far enough," she said. "Now tell me what you mean—spying on me like this!"



WITHOUT speaking, Lowden drew a letter from the breast pocket of his coat and held it out to her. She hesitated again, glanced from it to his face, took the letter and read it through.

"You see I hadn't an idea you were on this boat," he told her patiently. "My transfer and transportation reached Portland three hours before the *Hanalei* sailed. She's owned by the West Coast Lumber Company—my employers, you know. I wrote to you about it—it's quite a promotion and I thought you'd be glad. You got on at Eureka, of course?"

"Yes," said the girl tonelessly.

"I was in my stateroom studying when we stopped there," explained Lowden. "There's some of that trig I'm not sure about. But that don't matter. I didn't see you get on board. You drove over from Bayside, I suppose."

"I came on the stage."

"Would you mind telling me about your friend?"

"Well, now, I don't mind that," with a somewhat reckless air of defiantly braving the thing out. "He's my fiancé, and we're going to San Francisco to be married."

Lowden's eyes left the girl and slowly traveled the length of the ship to the quarterdeck, thence around the reeling, narrowing horizon, and back again across the dark scurry of water.

"How long have you known him?" he asked almost casually.

"A long time. More than a year. He's a traveling salesman—he handles Dad's business. Only you never met him—you didn't come home often enough to." This with implied blame.

"It seems I should have known, though," John said with a judicial air. "We were engaged, and——"

"Oh, don't begin to scold me!" cried the girl petulantly. "They've all done that, father and mother and—everybody. They all wanted me to marry you. But I—I love him. And I was afraid to tell you. I thought this would be the best way. After it's all over, why then, everybody'll understand without explaining. That's what he said, too."

Lowden shot one comprehensive look past her at Cranston. A well-proportioned figure of medium height, very carefully garbed, good, regular features, dark eyes that met Lowden's now with impatience bordering on anger. There was absolutely nothing upon which Lowden could definitely set a finger of disapproval.

"Well, he's probably very much in love," Lowden excused him fairly. "And your father may be prejudiced, though I admit I always admired his opinions, myself. But he can stop it yet. You're under age."

"But he don't know. He thinks I've gone for a visit to Seattle. And we can get married, and then—Oh!" The exclamation seemed forced out of her by the impact of a sudden frightening thought.

"Yes, there's the wireless," said Lowden, with a fleeting smile. "But as to using it——"

A sudden lurch of the ship nearly threw both from their feet; his arm went around her supportingly; but when they had recovered their balance he stepped back, and went on with careful deliberation—

"Are you sure you love him?"

"Oh, I do—I do!"

"You thought you loved me once."

"But that was different. Oh, it was different. I liked you. I still do, John. And I know I've treated you terribly. But I couldn't help it. I was afraid of you. I thought, if I told you— They were all against me. They all wanted me to marry you. But I couldn't, could I, if I loved him? And now—you won't stop us, will you, John? You won't hurt me like that?"

John drew back slightly from the sudden softness of her, the bending of her pliant

figure toward him, the pleading in her brown eyes.

"It's so hard to decide," he said apologetically. "I want to do the right thing. I want to be sensible about it." He looked doubtfully across at Cranston. "Anyway, there's plenty of time."

His eyes returned to her, and he took in at one glance all the youth and grace and unspoiled beauty of her. He looked into her eyes and saw, hidden behind her girlishness, and just springing into being, a glorious woman spirit.

Suddenly he stepped back, seemed to thrust something away from him with his hands, and with a muttered, "Well, I'll see you later," turned away from her and started, reeling somewhat blindly, toward the forecabin.

"Sensible!" murmured Alice, with just a touch of anger. She had always hated that word, which was John's favorite. "He wants to do the sensible thing! Well, I can see now he don't care so much. I'm glad of that, anyway." And she turned at Cranston's touch.



LOWDEN crossed the forecabin to the starboard side, and for half an hour paced persistently up and down the deck. The *Hanalei* pitched and tossed and rolled with increasing violence; from time to time the heightening wind sent cold spray flying along the companionways and spattering against the cabins; the uncanny yellowish twilight changed to a black opacity, broken only by the fugitive light of certain dim stars that still whirled giddily above the wind-rent clouds.

The diapason of the storm sweeping from the south to meet the ship deepened until it became like the low-toned and distant rumbling of unnumbered guns. But still the landsman stood his self-appointed watch, flung about, stumbling, falling twice, but very largely unconscious of it all.

At last he left his post, rounded the now deserted deck and entered the saloon. In the middle of the smoking-room a four-handed poker game was in progress. Half a dozen other men lounged in the deep-cushioned chairs. From a narrow compartment opening forward came a steady clink of glasses.

As Lowden passed the card party a pile of chips was upset by the motion of the ship, and spilled across the table. The inci-

dent evoked a boisterous roar of laughter.

Cranston was sitting by himself in a corner of the room, attesting his superiority to sea-sickness by smoking a very dark cigar.

Lowden was not so sure of himself. The close, warm air was in disagreeable contrast to the bracing atmosphere outside. The lurching of the ship, now clearly noticed, filled him with indescribable uneasiness. But he fortified himself by memory of former triumphs, and settled himself to wear the sickness down.

Some fifteen minutes after Lowden entered the smoking-room, the real storm burst upon the *Hanalei*.

The distant drumming had grown very near—had, in fact, encircled the ship and changed into a deep booming sound, as if the whole atmosphere were in a state of strange vibration. Upon this increasing roar had broken the pelting of flung rain, rattling like hailstones. The ship's motion had sensibly increased in violence, until it seemed made up entirely of alternate plunges and recoveries.

As she began one plunge downward from the crest of a sea, she was suddenly caught, checked, righted, and tilted backward, as if she were being forced stern-foremost into the hollow from which she had climbed.

But instead, she continued to rise. She rose so high, indeed, that it seemed impossible. Then she dropped almost as if the water, sweeping from under her, had left her unsupported in mid-air.

When she was midway in her descent it was at such an angle that unoccupied chairs skidded on the carpeted floor. Lowden, forcing his mind from unpleasant speculations as to whether she would ever rise again, glanced across at Cranston. Cranston was staring at nothing with a fixed and nervous smile.

The *Hanalei* brought up with a shuddering shock, as if she had been clubbed. For a moment she reeled, and then, as her momentarily reversed engines shifted again to full, she began to struggle upward like a groggy man. But another tremendous blow caught her on her port bow, she was shifted perceptibly from her course, and took to wallowing helplessly. And then from all sides the seas seemed to rush in upon her, to batter her with great crashes, to mount her sides. A sinister sound of water rushing along her upper deck penetrated the walls of the cabin.

Suddenly, as if with a great effort, she swung head-on to the seas again, cleared her decks, and took to pitching wildly. The next minute the tense silence of the smoking-room broke. There was a general sound of loud laughter and good-natured jeering as men beheld each other's shaken countenances.

The card party, their chips littering the floor, rushed with wild staggerings to the barroom. Cranston threw away his cigar, which had gone out, and lit another with great care.

The ship's first officer came in, a howling drive of wind and water with him, and struggled to close the door. His face was a blazing red, his eyes were very bright, brine dripped from his oil-skin coat and sogged in his sea-boots. But his voice was quite unruffled, as if all the elements had not power to shake official courtesies.

"It's the captain's orders that you gentlemen go to your staterooms," he said, "unless you intend to spend the night here. This deck's liable to be awash."

"Have a drink and forget it," some one shouted.

Another replied that, for his part, he intended to stay up and watch the blame old boat drown herself. That, in fact, seemed the general intention. The officer repeated the warning in the barroom, and went out again.

Near Lowden sat the hale old sergeant of marines. From time to time he had glanced shrewdly at Lowden. Now he spoke:

"Funny how people will kid themselves, isn't it? Every man jack of these fellows would know we're in danger if they let themselves think. But they won't face it.—Maybe it's as well, of course."

"You must think I'm an exception," said Lowden.

"I know," said the sergeant tersely. "Now, take that fellow over there." He pointed at Cranston. "I've been noticing him. He's had three drinks already. There he goes for the fourth. That little shaking up we just had made him realize too much, you see. Now, mind I'm not criticizing. He's probably better than the average man at bottom. He's not a drinking man as a usual thing—you can see that from his face. But it just goes to show you."

"Drowning is a nasty way to die," commented Lowden lightly.

A bronzed man in camping costume produced a violin from somewhere and began to play snatches of ragtime. In a minute there was a burst of uproarious laughter from the barroom, and two men, one very tall and the other ridiculously short and fat, danced out into the smoking-room. While the floor beneath them tipped and tossed, they executed a two-step up and down its length, and the applause they got almost drowned the roaring of the storm. Disappearing into the barroom again, they drew every one after them except the sergeant and Lowden.



WHEN Cranston came out, Lowden deliberately got up, struggled across the cabin, and lurched down into a chair by his side.

"Dirty weather," said Lowden casually.

Cranston had observed his approach with manifest uneasiness; now he displayed a very great relief.

"It certainly is," he agreed with an almost incongruous heartiness of tone. "The worst I've ever seen."

After that, Lowden said nothing. It was quite plain, too, from his air, that he intended to say nothing; and something in the situation seemed to get on Cranston's nerves. He fidgeted for a while and then burst out impulsively:

"Hang it all, Lowden, I want to say I'm sorry. Alice told me—of course I knew about you before. But I don't think I understood till now just how confoundedly rough on you it is. I'd like to feel that you——"

"Oh, that's all right," interrupted Lowden coolly. "It really doesn't matter." Cranston turned and looked at him with wide-eyed astonishment. "I mean, the main thing is that Alice marries the man she wants, and that seems to be you. But that wasn't what I wanted to see you about. It looks as though there was a chance of neither of us marrying her."

"What do you mean?"

At that instant the *Hanalei* took another of her frightful plunges. Head foremost she went down, as if she had staggered over the edge of a precipice. Both men seized the arms of their chairs and braced their feet against the floor.

All the unoccupied furniture began to slide forward. The center-table jammed itself in the barroom passageway. From

the barroom came an awful crash of falling bottles. And still the ship dove down menacingly, as into some vast and secret cavern of the sea.

She brought up slowly, a mortally scared and quivering thing, shrinking from the onslaught of a monstrous enemy. Then she was boarded. There was a terrific swirling sound all along her decks, as of a river run mad. Water fell upon her from above in toppling columns, so high was the wall behind the hollow into which she had thrust her prow. But she rose, rose with infinite agony of effort, as if struggling under a giant hand.

Cranston turned to Lowden and laughed unsteadily.

"That's what I mean," said Lowden. "This is the oldest boat on the coast. She isn't good enough for this sort of thing. She might never have come up from under that wave."

"Oh, pshaw!" scoffed Cranston.

"That's what I think, anyway," pursued Lowden. "If it happened, there'd be little enough chance for anybody, of course. But we'd have to make a fight for it. There's one person we'd both think of first, even before ourselves. And there might be a chance of your getting hurt, or something, and not being able to help her. Will you tell me the number of her stateroom?"

For a long minute Cranston, sobered and quickened into understanding, looked into Lowden's eyes. It may be that he saw in them many things, of jealousy, of not unwarranted anger, of high and holy hopes turned to bitter gall—but mainly he saw strength. That strength of soul which prevails over all things, and shall still prevail when the stars come crashing down. And Cranston's own young face grew strangely wistful.

"With pleasure," he said. "Number twenty-five, two doors aft of the parlor. Is it asking too much?" He was holding out his hand.

"After that!" exclaimed Lowden. He rose with Cranston's hand still in his. "I knew you were a *man*," he said. He turned abruptly away.

The ship continued to plunge as if she were demented. The voice of the wind was now a pounding roar, as the tempest charged down upon the vessel with a million hoof-beats.

From time to time a wild scream like that

of a soul overborne and lost, born somehow out of the confusion of air-pressures, passed evanescently overhead. But mainly there were the solid crashings of water, the heavy broadsides of the sea, pounding the *Hanalei* with a brutal ferocity.

Then would come the long moments of a lull, during which the reassembled company in the smoking-room looked at each other with faces in which fright had at last become confessed. Only the old sergeant sat grimly impassive, showing the countenance of a man who had looked upon death so often and steadfastly that he had penetrated its frightful mask.

The agony of the beset ship increased. Her strained plates groaned ominously, and from time to time she seemed to writhe. It was then that her helmsman would partially lose control of her, and she would swerve suicidally, as if seeking rest in the trough. Had she ever completed that intention she would have gone down like a diving-bell. But she was always righted, and she leaped into each of the gigantic hollows head on, and emerged victorious. Always these hollows deepened, however, and their seething caldrons of fury increased.

"One of them will surely be the end of her," said Lowden to himself.

But she was to meet her fate in another way.



AT FOUR bells of the mid-watch the *Hanalei* went aground.

By luck and very skilful handling she had weathered the worst of the storm. The wind had died to an ordinary gale, and, though it still rolled mountains, the sea had become a calculable element. It no longer handled the ship with hate, but—as might have seemed to one who foresaw the end—with the grim tolerance one feels for a doomed adversary. For the *Hanalei* was far off her course, and Duxberry reef was rising under her keel.

To the smoking-room had come quiet, the relaxation of tired nerves. Men dozed in chairs, their bodies thrown into grotesque attitudes by the incessant and still considerable pitching. Others sat about and smoked and talked with conscious stupidity.

Cranston had been asleep for half an hour. His dreams were pleasant, for he smiled. These fleeting smiles disturbed Lowden profoundly, but from time to time he caught himself watching for them.

On a downward swoop of the ship she struck. With a diminished but persistent motion, she slashed open her bottom along her entire length. On the next billow she rose, and then dove despondently into the deep waters ahead. Immediately she began to sink.

Lowden, flung from his chair against the wall with the first shock, recovered his balance convulsively, and was the first man to reach the cabin door. Tearing it open, he rushed out upon a deck aslant and vibrating. A horrible dull grinding sound offended his ears. Upon it broke an indescribable medley of human voices in terror. Over all a shouted command—

"All hands on deck!"

Lowden ran forward. He saw the second officer and three sailors already busy with a life-boat. Crossing the forecastle, he sprinted aft to stateroom twenty-five.

He shouted and pounded on the closed door, and a frightened cry answered him. He tried it, and found it jammed. Holding the knob, he drew back and drove his body against it. It gave way, and he fell inside.

"Alice?" he questioned.

A form all a-tremble rushed upon him with a grateful sob—

"John!"

"Your coat— where is it?" demanded Lowden brusquely.

"Oh!" Alice gasped. "Here."

He bundled her in it, and swung her out upon the deck. It was already listing ominously, bow down.

"Are we going—to be drowned?" cried Alice.

"No!" replied John forcibly. "The ship's going down, but the life-boats won't."

He rushed her down the incline.

"Where—where's Tom?" asked Alice faintly, as they rounded the bow.

"Oh, he's all right," said Lowden. "You see, he was asleep when it happened. That's why—"

They had reached the life-boat, which swung ready in the davits. John buttoned his own coat roughly around Alice, ignoring her uncertain remonstrance, and passed her to the officer. Turning, he started across the forecastle again. He had a vision of the lame girl, with such very bright eyes, struggling with the door of her stateroom.

As he neared the scuppers, a tremendous wave crashed against the ship's forward beam and spilled over her sinking bow. At

the same moment Lowden collided violently with another running man. They fell sprawling, Lowden's greater impetus carrying both to the rail. Before they could recover themselves, or lay hold of anything, they were afloat.

When the wave receded, it carried the two men with it, exactly as if a great tongue had reached up from the sea and licked them off.

Going down, Lowden shoved the frantically struggling unknown away from him with a great effort. For a moment he was whirled helplessly in the surge of the broken wave, then the confused motion passed, and he swam easily upward.

He came to the surface in a hollow, and could not see the ship. His shoes were like weights, dragging him down. With great difficulty, nearly strangling himself, he fished a pocket-knife from his trousers, cut the laces and worked his shoes off.

Completing the job, he found himself being lifted swiftly up the smooth side of a mountain of water. When he reached the summit he forced his head with powerful strokes well above the water and looked around.

The *Hanalei* was already far beyond hailing distance. There was no sign of the man with whom he had taken the plunge. But as the wave passed on, and he slid down the side of it, Lowden caught sight of something dark bobbing on its surface. He swam toward it and discovered an oar.

Laying hold of it, he began to shout. His voice sounded incredibly weak, as if he were crying out into interstellar vacancy. But he yelled again and again, until he heard a voice faintly answering him.

He kept calling and pushing the oar as best he could toward the other voice, which grew steadily nearer. Finally the other swimmer became visible, approaching with a loud, panicky splashing. He seized the oar excitedly, and dragged it completely under.

"Easy, there," rasped Lowden harshly. "Float, — it! Keep your head!"

The peremptory command steadied the other instantly. He straightened out until he lay like Lowden, body just below the surface of the water, head showing above it, and hands gripping the oar. But there was a new startled note in his voice when he replied—

"Is that you, Lowden?"

"Yes, Cranston," replied Lowden evenly.

Then a ruffle of water splurged over the two heads, and when they emerged, choking and spitting brine, both knew that one too many clung to the now wholly submerged oar.

And they drifted on, with the shadow of that knowledge on their souls, blacker than the water which at intervals closed over them both. Even in the smoother water, with the buoyancy of the oar fairly divided between them, each had to struggle a little to keep afloat.

"Alice was gone," said Cranston after a minute. "Did you find her?"

"I put her in a boat," replied Lowden. "She's safe, if any one is. Look there!"

It was the *Hanalei*. She was lying a long way off, with her upper lights burning very close to the water's edge. As they sank into the trough, she disappeared. The next and last time they saw her, the lights were out, and only a triangular section of hull loomed up darkly.

"They had time to get everybody off, anyway," said Lowden. "But not time for muster. We'll not be missed, unless some one saw us go overboard."

"Not a chance," said Cranston despondently.

"There might be," contradicted Lowden. "We'll wait, anyway."

"Wait!" exclaimed Cranston sharply. "What else—"

He checked himself abruptly, with a quick intake of breath.

"We're well to the east of where the *Hanalei* went down, anyway," said Lowden. "Land's to the east. The life-boats may pass near us."

They dallied with that hope for half an hour, uniting their voices at intervals in great cries. At the end of that time Cranston was noticeably weak. Lowden, too, was feeling the strain of the constant effort and the intermittent stranglings. But it was plain that, if he would have the oar to himself, he needed to do nothing but hold on a little longer. Cranston's grip was slackening fast.

"There's still a chance," said Lowden, "for one of us?"

"Eh!" exclaimed Cranston, as if he did not understand.

"I've been thinking it over," Lowden said slowly, "and I guess you win. For the main thing still is—what I said it was in the

smoking-room. If I thought I still had a chance with Alice—but I haven't. I never had, really. I hung on and hung on, and finally won her promise, but that's all. She didn't know then she had love to give. And so I wronged her, when it seems on the surface as if she wronged me. Well, I pay."

Cranston said nothing.

"You're young," said Lowden, "and you're a little weak. You need to watch yourself. Take this from a man that's about to die for you. If I didn't think you were sound at bottom I wouldn't. And I'm not going to ask you to live—if you do live—so as to give her a happy life. If it's necessary to ask for a promise like that, the promise would be worthless. But if ever something tells you you are on the point of hurting her, think of this.

"You have more than an even chance," he went on hastily, as if he were afraid of being interrupted. "You'll last till morning anyway, and then it'll be warmer and you'll last longer. And as soon as the life-boats get ashore, and we're missed, they'll come out to look for us."

"But I can't let you —," began Cranston.

"It isn't such a great sacrifice," said Lowden. "I don't say there's nothing left in life for me without Alice, because there is. Life's always been a struggle with me—out of the ditch and out of poverty—I was beginning to win, and I'd like to taste some of the fruits.

"But for all that, I don't think there'll ever come a time when I'll fear death less. And you, with Alice's love, you'll never fear it more. And so it follows—it's only sensible—Good-by."

"Wait!" cried Cranston, suddenly and impetuously desirous of refusing the sacrifice.

But Lowden had already slipped off the oar. For several minutes Cranston heard him swimming strongly away. Finally the steady strokes died slowly into silence.



CRANSTON worked himself to the middle of the oar, lashed himself fast to it with strips torn from his shirt, and so drifted, a tiny atom of helpless

life lost in the maw of immensity.

In the sudden great loneliness that descended upon him, he pictured to himself that other man swimming out into the black vastness until he sank. As he imaged it, a glow overcoming the chill of the water passed through him, and he wept for his own unworthiness.

Then from the depths of self-despisal, he seemed to rise to the heights of knowledge. He seemed to see that it was not according to the eternal verities that Lowden should die, and he live. It was written that their fates were one.

At first fearfully, and then calmly, he prepared himself for death—and so, in greater measure than he had ever been prepared before, for life.

For Lowden, struggling without hope into the unknown, fell half an hour later, by blind chance or inflexible destiny or a miracle of God, into the path of the last of the life-boats to quit searching for the two which a count of noses had shown missing. And he guided the boat as best he could back to Cranston, but it was a long time before they found him, and Cranston slumped into unconsciousness when they brought him over the side. He awoke to the warmth of a sandy, sun-kissed beach, and with Alice's arms around him.

And over Lowden Alice cried, and she kissed his hand, for she divined both the surface and the inner truth of all that had happened that night.

But to Cranston she gave her lips, the way of love with a woman being strong past all understanding.

When they reached a village she sought out Lowden again.

"I'm sorry—so sorry," she said. "I wish I could—oh, I do wish I could. But I can't. And you understand, don't you? And Tom wants me to— You won't mind so very much, will you, if we get married here?"

Lowden gulped down the bitterest draft life held for him and replied evenly:

"Not at all. It strikes me as—under the circumstances—quite the sensible thing to do."

The Heels of Chance



by Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "The Sinews of War," "Heroes All," etc.

MCCONAUGHY cursed with choice profusion and elaborate attention to personal detail whilst the whole landing-beach dropped work and listened awestruck. But the little dark man, with the hooped gold earrings, simply bobbed politely and smiled, as he patted the neck of the nearest mule.

"Ye dwarfed child o' impotence, ha' ye no more than the animation o' your face for sign o' human intelligence?" demanded McConaughy at last.

"I don't think the blighter savvies yer lingo, Guv'nor," suggested a Tommie, with a snicker.

"Oh, don't ye?" retorted McConaughy sarcastically. "Ye're a man o' penetration, that's apparent. English, by your looks. I thought so. Did ye ever know an Englishman to miss the chance to mak' a fool out o' himself?"

This to the crowd in general, which remained discreetly silent.

Somewhat encouraged by the tame reception of his insult, McConaughy resumed haranguing the man with the mules.

"Ammunection—d'ye see?" he roared. "Amm-mun-ee-shun! Put—on—mule! Want—it—in—the—trenches! D'ye see? Ye leathery-hided, evil-eyed—"

"Easy there! Are ye fightin' again, McConaughy? Make way, bhoys, make way. Can't ye see I'm needed at the front?"

And Father Cashin, the chaplain of the West Galway Fusiliers, bustled into the ring. McConaughy's grimace of rage faded into a cheerful grin.

"Ho, little man, 'tis glad I am to see ye!" he exclaimed. "I'm afther thryin' to get ammuneection for your regiment and ma own men. But not a worrd can I push through the skull o' this bit o' corruption here—and 'tis his mules we're wantin' for carttin' the ammuneection up to the front."

"He'll be cheerful, at the least," said Father Cashin, with a brief glance at the bone of contention, who still smiled and bobbed his head politely, stroking the neck of the mule he leaned against. "That's something to be goin' on. Now, what would ye call him?"

"Wi'out desire o' offendin' ye, little man, a misbegotten loon o' your own denomination—an' maybe one-half naygur."

The priest pursed up his lips contemplatively.

"Ye do be nowhere at the guessin' game, McConaughy," he pronounced. "He's a Greek—in the which case he's none av me flock—or he's Eyetalian?"

The man's eyes glinted at this last word, and he exclaimed excitedly:

"Si, Si! Maltese!"

"Eh?" said Father Cashin. "Maltese, is it?"

He emitted a voluble string of fluid syllables, and in a trice the muleteer was

vying with him, hands and face wriggling frantically. Father Cashin turned to McConaughy in triumph.

"Sure, the man's Maltese, an' as good a British subject as yourself."

"But how did ye talk to him?" pressed McConaughy in admiration.

"In what but the tongue in which he habitually convarses? D'ye think it was for nothing, McConaughy, I shtudied seven years av me life under the Pope av Rome in the midst av all the Eyetalians?"

"Did ye, now?"

"I did. So ye see there's some good come out av Rome. An' what did ye want wid the spalpeen?"

"His mules—no less. What I ha' been tellin' him this twenty minutes past."

"'Tis soon done if ye go about it the right way. Show him the boxes ye'll be wantin' him to take."

McConaughy indicated the pile of small-arm and machine-gun ammunition cases, and the Maltese lifted them deftly onto the rude pack-saddles with which his string of diminutive mules were equipped.

The group of idle soldiers that had gathered about them broke up and drifted away. It was late afternoon and the sun was setting in a sullen, gray sky. The waves washed the beach with a rattling swish of gravel, and from up and down the tenuous length of Gallipoli Peninsula came the sporadic echoes of firing.

A big gun down near Sed ul Bahr was dropping projectiles in the bay close to where they stood, evidently searching for the landing-place by azimuth fire. But nobody noticed this, except to comment on an unusually high geyser of shell-tossed water. It was two days since the landing-beach had been carried, and in that time the greenest troops had become calloused to danger and suffering by the monotonous grind of ceaseless fighting.

McConaughy and Father Cashin discussed this phase of the situation as they picked their way through the sand-dunes at the head of the string of mules.

"'Tis tonight or never, me big bucko," said the little priest.

"I agree wi' your logic—strange as that may seem. We should ha' thrust out yon Turrks at the beginnin' o' things, an' if all this blunderrin' army had fought wi' the cirrcumspeckshun and impulse o' ma own company an' your regiment—why, then,

little man, we'd be by the worrst o' our troubles."

Father Cashin nodded.

"There'll be no doubt av that. But an empty dhudeen is an empty dhudeen. Sorra a speck more av 'baccy ye have for currsin' the pouch wid a hole in it. An' now for yourself, McConaughy. Ye've stood well by the regiment, an' by me—an' I take it kindly av ye. But there's no call for riskin' the lives av yourself and your men in this Donneybrook shcrap we'll be havin' tonight. I'm thinkin' there'll be more bloody pates than honor at the hind end av it. Ye know, widout me tellin' ye, ye have no real right at the front where ye've been afther blanchandherin' your way, an' a worrd wid the Shtaff would get ye back where ye belong—an' that's on the blue sea beyond."

McConaughy halted at the opening of a nullah in the last line of sand-dunes, and placed a heavy hand on the priest's shoulder.

"Any man but yourself that spoke to me this wise would be stretchin' himself on that prickle-grass."

"Would ye be threatenin' me, McConaughy?" demanded Father Cashin, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Nay. I know better. Ye ha' me cowed, little man, for a' your black Papistical coverin' an' priestly huggle-muggle—an' I'll say again I mean no disrespect to yourself by the language that is ma only speech on certain subjects. Let be on that. We ken each other."

"We do."

Father Cashin slapped him on the back with a vigor that made McConaughy grunt with surprise.

"Ye ha' more guts in that fat body o' yours' than I gied ye ccredit for. Now, touchin' what ye said a while back. I wrrecked the *Joan o' Arc* to get the Fusiliers ashore. Ma ownerrs are safe from loss on her. I ha' no worry to me on that score. There's thirty-odd o' the *Joan's* crew left wi' me—not a married man among 'em. I'd as soon sail wi' Englishmen as married men. An' if ye think, in the cirrcumstances, I'll deny maself an' ma men the chance o' the finest bit o' fightin' we've had this mony weeks, ye ha' workked a ways off your thrue courrse. I'd be shamed to call maself Ulsterr-borrrn, if I drew out o' this, now."

"I knew ye'd say so, McConaughy,"

said the priest, as he turned into the nullah.

"Besides," added McConaughy, a glint in his eye, "what would your Papistical Irishers do, wi'out ma Prrotestant die-harreds to gie 'em courage this night. Eh?"

"Do?" retorted Father Cashin. "Why they'd just do not as well as they'll be afther doin' wid you to egg 'em on."



THEY turned an angle of the nullah and ducked instinctively as a bullet zipped by into the sand.

"I'll be shpeakin' to Colonel O'Mallagh about that east wall. It should be raised," commented Father Cashin. "Hi," he called to the muleteer, with a warning gesture at the low sand-bank on the side toward the enemy.

"Si, si, padre," responded the little man, grinning his continual pleasant smile.

"Does he know nothin' but 'See, see'?" grumbled McConaughy. "For the wall, Cashin, ye need not be worryin'. If we do as we ought tonight, there'll be no enemy in miles o' this."

"If we do," sighed the priest, looking back despondently at the vista of the bay a short distance below, dimly mysterious in the Spring twilight, a few lanterns twinkling already on the landing-beach, where the crumpled hull of the *Joan*, which had served as the army's landing-stage, was already turning rusty under the sweep of salt-breakers.

"If!" he said again. "There's a deal av mismanagement here, McConaughy. I'm wid ye in all that ye say av the English by reason av the brave bhoys I've seen die needlessly here these past eight-and-fortty hours. My God! To think av the mothers an' the wives an' shweetheartts will be weepin' their eyes out this many a weary, weary month—an' all for this!"

McConaughy looked sidewise with surprise. This was a new angle to Father Cashin for his consideration, although the hundreds of blustering raw Irishmen who confessed to the West Galway's corpulent little priest knew the inner heart of him that was tender as any woman's.

"Ha' done," said the Ulsterman hastily. "Ye'll be turnnin' ma bowels to wather by that kind o' talk. Let be, until we've done the worrk the Lorr'd has appointed for us. It may not be safe worrk, but 'tis the humblin' o' the heathen, an' Papist or Christian, I tak' it that's no a very bad cause to die in."

"Ye do be havin' the right av me, McConaughy. I think shame av meself for weakness. But—well, God's blessing on us, an' we're here once more wid me bhoys."

The base camp of the Fusiliers behind the line of trenches was spread out before them, a network of hollows, partly artificial, partly natural, all linked together by shallow passageways and cloaked by somber scrub-trees that clung to the inhospitable sandy soil, blasted and tossed by the mighty winds that blew from the Mediterranean. A rumble of greeting met McConaughy and Father Cashin as they passed group after group of men off duty, and made their way toward the regimental headquarters, a tent heaped over with tree-boughs and dirt, as some protection against shrapnel.

Colonel O'Mallagh, the commander of the Fusiliers, came out to meet them.

"Gad, it's a relief to see men again at the end of an hour or two," he cried. "Life seems devilish short here. What have you there Captain McConaughy?"

"Ammunection. Wi' the help o' ma little friend here, I commandeered this mule-thrain an' the Maltese Eyetalian that 'tends it."

"Good, we'll need every round we can get tonight. Our people are to have the right of the line. We lead the advance."

"In that case, I'd best be lookin' to ma own company," said McConaughy. "I'm no good to ye where the Maltese is concerned. Ye must convarrse wi' him through the friend o' the Pope. He shpeaks nought but Eyetalian—though, if we get the time, I'll thry him on Jock Grant, ma Firrst Officer, an' Evan Apgar, ma Chief Engineer. It may be he kens the Gaelic or Welsh."

II



"'TIS an awfu' darrk night," remarked Jock Grant, as he sidled along the communication trench with due precaution against jostling the dynamite bombs strapped on either hip.

"If ye mus' talk, doan't ye maak so greaat noise," hissed Evan Apgar behind him. "We haf Turrks to t'e front, not shadders."

Jock turned to retort and stumbled over a tree-root that projected across the foot-way. He landed against the trench wall with a rattle of equipment, and the file

halted in expectant horror. But no explosion came.

McConaughy shouldered his way to the front, exasperation evident in his haste.

"Ye blunderrin' loon," he rasped to Grant. "Would ye sacrifice the lives o' the comp'ny for the sake o' a bit o' convarrse on the weather? This is not play. Get for'ard now, an' not a word, or I'll send ye back to the camp-guard."

He put himself in the lead and his lieutenants followed, Evan snickering to himself, until Jock turned and drove a skilful elbow into a place calculated to connect with the Welsh engineer's source of breath. A choke, and Evan was still. McConaughy, in his painstaking study of the winding course of the trench, did not notice this violation of his orders, a good thing for both Grant and Apgar.

The sap zigzagged back and forth through several clumps of dwarf trees and coarse bushes, until finally it emerged upon the crest of a low rise, where it straightened out to right and left and wound along the brow of the miniature eminence. A Fusilier sentry, stationed here, challenged in a whisper, and McConaughy gave the word for the night—

"Churchill."

"Who are ye?" muttered the man.

"The bombing party o' the Fusiliers," answered McConaughy. "Captain McConaughy an' the crew o' the *Joan o' Arc*."

"Good luck go wid ye, sor. The colonel an' Father Cashin are waitin' for ye over beyant the next traversse."

"Thank ye, ma man. I must firrst check off ma party before I join them."

He stepped out of the narrow way against the front wall of the firing-trench and counted man after man as his crew filed past him, each one equipped with at least two bombs in addition to rifle, bayonet and ammunition.

"Thirty-two, thirrtty-three, thirrtty-four," counted McConaughy, "thirrtty-five, thirrtty——"

He stopped in amazement as his fingers touched a long, velvety ear that twitched from his grip.

"An' who might ye be?" he demanded. "By the power o' the Presbyt'ry, 'tis a donkey!"

"*Si, si, signor*," murmured a gentle voice at his elbow.

McConaughy reached out a brawny

arm and grasped a handful of shirt upon which he flashed the brief glare of a match.

"Ma Maltese Eyetalian!" he exclaimed. "May I die a Papist! How come ye here, ye imp o' Satan?"

The muleteer shrugged his shoulders with tragic earnestness, and volleyed a string of Latin explanations.

McConaughy seized him by the throat.

"Speak soft or I'll brain ye!"

The muleteer cowered and mumbled something about the "padre," which he repeated over and over again. In the mean time, his donkey stood quietly, with an occasional flick of its tail, and the Irish sentry walked back from his post to learn what was delaying the commander of the bombing party.

"He'll be afther talkin' av the Father, sorr, Father Cashin," opined the sentry.

"Is he, indeed?" commented McConaughy. "Then to Cashin he'll go an' explain what he do be doin' here at this time o' the night."

He released his hold on the miserable Italian's throat, hesitated, and then snapped:

"Get for'ard now, ye lubber—and no noise, d'ye hear me, no noise!"

"*Si, si, Signor*," gasped the little muleteer, and he scurried after McConaughy's men, his donkey pattering along beside him.

A hundred yards farther on, where the line of trenches was masked entirely by a considerable clump of pine-trees, the *Joan's* crew and the Fusiliers were grouped on a narrow front. A squat figure which advanced to meet him McConaughy recognized as Father Cashin.

"We've been waitin' for ye, McConaughy," said the priest. "What do ye be afther—an' for the love av Peter, what have ye brought wid ye?"

"No less nor your own particular friend, the Maltese Eyetalian," said McConaughy drily.

"What's he want here?"

"Ask him."

"Troth, an' I'll do that same. The man must be daft."

A few spluttered sentences, and Father Cashin threw up his hands and chuckled vigorously.

"Save us, 'tis a warrior, a Turrk-eater," he remarked.

"What does he say?" asked McConaughy.

"Why, he has a better idea av juty than

some men I've met. He considered it his obligation to bring resarrve ammunition to the firing-line."

"Well, now he's brought it, he can go back," suggested McConaughy.

Father Cashin nodded. But his next words brought a flood of passionate objection from the muleteer.

"A warrior, did I say?" observed the priest. "He's a hero, no less. Sure, he demands to proceed an' bathe wid the rest av us in the blood av Turks."

"He's no place here," said McConaughy impatiently. "Send him back. We've no time to waste wi' him, Cashin."

"Maybe so."

But Father Cashin's commands drew forth more oratory and gesticulatory speech so vivid that even McConaughy gained some comprehension of the man's meaning.

"Divil a bit av arrgyment can I think av to answer him," confessed Father Cashin at last. "He says he's a British subject, same as us."

"But he's no right here," insisted McConaughy.

"An' neither has yourself, if ye come to that," said the priest.

"But 'tis diff'rent entirely. Now, listen——"

"Harrk to me, McConaughy." The little priest spoke gravely. "I've a fellow feeling for the man. Mind ye, he comes from Malta, one av them islands the English do be after seizin' to themselves from time to time, since time began. I misdoubt the poor spalpeens are kep' down the same as Erin's folk——"

"I hold wi' none o' your Fenianism, Cashin," interrupted McConaughy, hotly. "In Ulster——"

"Maybe so, maybe so. An' 'tis not criticizing your cause I'd be, McConaughy, as ye well know. But what I do say is that the English would be nowhere if 'twas not for the Irish, North an' South, Ulstermen an' Galwaymen, Belfas' men an' Dublin men. An' what recognition do they be givin' us, eh? I ask ye, now, man? What? Ulster or Galway, 'tis all the same. We get the lean bit av the shinbone, after the dogs have picked it bare. We may fight betwixt ourselves, but we both despise the English."

"Ay, ye ha' the right o' that, Cashin," McConaughy conceded. "But I do not see——"

"But ye will see! Man alive, this bhoys here comes from an island the like av ours, conquered and mis-ruled, I doubt not, by the English for their own ends. An' they degrade him that would be a soldier by makin' a muleteer out av him! By the Staff av St. Pathrick, we'll put the English in their place an' make him a soldier!"

McConaughy dropped his hand in a bear's clutch on the muleteer's shoulder.

"A grrand thought, Cashin!" he cried. "Ye ha' a head on your neck, little man. As for your Maltese friend—— An' by the way, how will he call himself?"

Father Cashin and the muleteer consulted a moment the Italian's eyes glinting with joy as he heard the decision which had been reached, and then the priest announced:

"Nicolo Zapolo. An' he says he has a knife that thirsts for the blood av Turks—— divil a less!"

"He's a man for ma own measure—— Nicolo," declared McConaughy. "He shall march wi' us an' ha' all the fightin' his belly can hold. Come your ways after me, the two o' ye."



IT WAS well past midnight, and the cannonade, which had been steady throughout the earlier hours of the night, had all but ceased. Now and then the sentries exchanged a shot, but the artillery was quiet. It was damp and clammy, with a mist from the Ægean.

"A fery long time we've peen here, in-teet," grumbled Evan Apgar.

"You'll get the word soon enough," McConaughy assured him cheerfully. "'Twill be all the cannon on the fleet an' ashore, an' ye'll be by-ordinar' fortunate if ye do not lose an ear-drum."

As he spoke, a green rocket shot up from the center of the position and its million falling stars were answered by a red rocket from the fleet.

"Harrk till she hoots," remarked Jock. "Wull the lassies yon greet wi' the——"

He was checked by a single thunderous roar of big guns that grew and waxed without cessation, that belted the peninsula from end to end and that embraced their immediate position in a fiery arc from shore to shore.

"Out o' your trenches men!" shouted McConaughy.

And the crew of the *Joan of Arc* scrambled after him.

The officers of the Fusiliers held their men in leash for five minutes, according to orders, so that McConaughy's detachment might have a chance to launch their bombs and break down the Turkish defense. But Father Cashin and his protégé the muleteer were loath to see McConaughy get ahead and they endeavored to follow him. This was all very well for the priest and Nicolo, but Nicolo's donkey got half-way up the dirt wall only to slide down upon a cursing private, who refused to see why his comrades laughed at him.

It remained for a squad to boost the donkey and its load of ammunition boxes up out of the trench by sheer man power, by which time McConaughy's party had gained a hopeless head start, and the general advance was begun.

The Turks were firing high, aiming at the ridge which marked the British position, and consequently, by crouching close to the ground, McConaughy and his men reached the hostile trenches without any loss. They snipped through the entanglements with their wire-cutters, crawled forward on hands and knees, and at fair heaving distance discharged their bombs. Then they went in with bayonets and butts, thirty-odd mad sailormen, who did not know fear, who chanted psalms as they fought, and alternately cursed and prayed. At their heels stormed the Fusiliers.

The first trench was carried with a rush. The second gave under increasing pressure.

Reinforcements were brought up; bombs were thrown at arm's length, caught and hurled back before they could explode; over a front of ten miles men were joined in the old-fashioned warfare, knee to knee, stock to stock.

The *Joan's* crew fought in a loose wedge formation, with giant Jock Grant at the apex, and McConaughy and Evan Apgar flanking him. That wedge was never motionless; it pushed onward with the remorselessness of a steam-roller. Several companies of the Fusiliers saw what was going on and they joined the formation, giving it mass and extra impact. So the second-line trenches were taken and the Turks began to flee.

McConaughy seized advantage of the breathing-spell afforded to glance around him.

"Ye wicked limb av the Ould Nick!" bel-
lowed an unmistakable voice. "Would ye

now? A-a-aa-h-h! Take that! Bate the spalpeen, Nick. Sol 'Tis only in your name ye resemble the Evil One, me son."

McConaughy ran forward around an intervening rock-sangar, and almost stumbled over Father Cashin, Nicolo and the donkey, valiantly defending the precious beast against two big Turks. The donkey was playing a noble rôle, for evidently having discerned who were his true friends in the mêlée, he was lashing out with his heels at the Moslems and discomfited their every attack. Fortunately, their rides were empty, and Father Cashin's clumsy passes with a gun he had picked up deterred them from filling their magazines, whilst Nicolo, knife in hand, glided about them, watching for an opening.

"This way, men o' the *Joan*!" roared McConaughy. "Rescue, here! Rescue!"

But no more help was required. The Turks, seeing that the odds were against them, turned and ran.

"There's no holdin' ye back, little man," cried McConaughy. "Ye're too venture-some, by far."

"I go where me bhoys go—or where ye go, yourself."

"Ay, ye're a contentious bit Jesuit, as I know to ma sorrer. An' now what?"

"Nicolo and meself will be afther searchin' for another foeman or two."

"Come wi' me. There's few Turks ye've left between this and the straits, but we'll see."

Here on the far right of the line the fight seemed to be as good as over, but a few hundred yards on their left one wing of the Fusiliers were still battering the enemy's second-line trenches; and judging by the racket from the rest of the front, the Turks were giving a good account of themselves.

"'Tis a pity there are not more o' us," observed McConaughy, as he led on in the track of their successful charge.

"What's wrong wid ye?" asked Father Cashin.

"We're goin' a shade too far to suit me. 'Twould be all right, if the rest o' the line had gone on, but—see for yourself."

"Why not go back?" suggested the priest.

"I'll do that same," agreed McConaughy grimly. "But firrst, we must get together the men that ha' gone on this way."

The darkness had lifted somewhat, and they were able to follow the trail of the advance by the wounded and stragglers. It

led across the summit of the inner range of hills and down a considerable valley, which was intersected by a small stream. At the wreck of what had been a farmhouse on its bank they caught up with Jock Grant.

"A grand fight, skipper!" he panted. "'Tis ma candid opeenion we hae loppit off a mony score o' these deil's spawn. I canna deny the fechtin' on the land gies a mon a pleasure he'll ne'er encounterr on the water."

"Where are your men?" demanded McConaughy angrily. "Ha' ye left them, ye zany?"

"Nae, nae," denied Jock with an injured expression. "They're but up yon glen assailin' a handfu' o' Turks that fled into a shielin' ye'll come tae at the hinder end. Evan's wi' 'em."

"An' ye should be wi' 'em, yourself. Get on, Mr. Grant. We ha' no minutes to spare. We are cut off here."

Jock's mouth gaped open, as he boggled this alarming statement. Then he disappeared at a run up the valley.

"Is it as bad as that?" queried Father Cashin.

McConaughy shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Look over yon. The rest o' the Fusiliers are fallin' back. The English, as ye might expect, ha' bitten off more nor they could chew. Where will we be, if we stay here, a half-hour from now?"

A burst of firing came from the direction Jock Grant had taken. Father Cashin's forehead was knitted in a puzzled frown.

"What ye've said will be the truth, I'm thinkin'," he asserted. "But as well try to drag a weasel from his hole as put Grant to pryin' loose those bhoys from a nest av Turrks. 'Tis for you an' me to do, McConaughy, if 'tis to be done at all."

McConaughy looked across the hill they had last passed at the receding fighting lines.

"Ye're right," he agreed shortly.

He turned to the dozen or so of stragglers who had collected about them.

"If you men know the side o' your bread that's butthered, ye'll mak' tracks the way ye came," he advised. "It's more nor doubtfu' I can get the rest o' these loons out o' here. Ye'd best go back wi' Father Cashin."

The priest snorted indignantly.

"Is it back ye'd have me go? McCon-

aughy, ye have a — uncivil tongue in your head by turns. I'll stay here."

"Sure, an' we're wid ye, Father dear," spoke up a shock-headed corporal. "This'll be no time to show our backs to the Turks."

"'Tis none o' ma responsibeelity, then," said McConaughy gruffly. "Come ather me—an' do not be dhraggin' your heels."

As they ran up the valley, the firing ahead of them increased in volume, raged furiously, and dropped in diminuendo to a silence that was broken by a medley of Irish yells and Protestant hymns of exultation. McConaughy burst on the scene to find several hundred Fusiliers and sailors prancing about the one street of the village in which they had trapped the last remnant of the Turks.

"Is it mad ye all are?" he demanded, after he had succeeded in drawing them within sound of his voice.

A rather shamefaced captain and three subalterns denied the accusation for their men, and Evan Apgar was at pains to sink well in the rear of the crowd.

"Look behind ye," adjured McConaughy.

They looked and saw a wall of fire that reached once more from sea to sea. The Turkish reinforcements, surging forward in echelon, had flowed back over the area the Fusiliers had cleared temporarily. And already the dawn was whitening the eastern sky.

"Ye've been thinkin' yourselves heroes," continued McConaughy. "Oh, I know ye! Ye went on wi' never a thought o' discipline or orders, just hot passion to be tearin' the Turrks' throats. An' now—hecht! It looks to me that the Turrks will be tearrin' the throats o' ye—unless ye surrenderr."

"Isn't there anything to be done?" asked the captain nervously.

"Look about ye," returned McConaughy.

"Can't we fight our way back?" demanded a subaltern. "There wouldn't many of us get through, but that's better——"

"Ye speak like a man, ma young friend, but ye speak the truth," commented McConaughy. "There'd be too — few to get through at the finish."

Dejection was plain in every face. The men who had been elated with victory a few minutes before were now subdued by the idea of defeat.

"There's but three things to do," resumed McConaughy. "We can turn and fight

our way back—in the which case, if ye ask me, we'll all perrish; we can surrenderr; or we can bide where we stand an' mak' such a fight as we may, in 'the hope the English will send aid to us—an' that's puttin' a trust in the English I canna feel justified."

Father Cashin pushed his way to the front.

"There's a fourrth courrse we could be takin'—if ye're all men enough," he said. "Don't frown, McConaughy. Me friend Nicolo is a janius, no less. The idea is his."

"Are ye triflin'?"

"Troth, an' I'm not. Me liberty is as dear to me as is yours to you. Harrk to me, now. Nicolo here is an adopted son av the counthry. He's worrked hereabouts, an' he knows the roads an' the lingo. He says why do we not kape on the way we're goin'? The Turrks are not lookin' for an enemy in their rear."

"But we'd be sure to meet more soldiers."

"Maybe so. An' we'll tell 'em we're Germans. There do be Germans in most av the Turrk forrts hereabouts, Nicolo says. Bid the bhoys throw away their caps, an' take fezes wherever they may. A fez will make a good German out av a poor Englishman any day."

"An' afther that?"

"Afther that, we'll discuss what's to come next. For the moment, 'tis pressin' we get somewheres away from here."

McConaughy drew a deep breath.

"The thought's a mad one, but I'm for it," he announced. "'Tis the best I ha' heard yet."

There was a general murmur of assent among the officers.

"'Tis just chance, no more," remarked Father Cashin. "But what Irishman, Ulsterman or Galwayman, would 'be refusin' to kiss the heels av Chance? Discarrhd your caps, me bhoys. Become Turrks. A fatigue parrrty into these houses to forage headgear!"

III

 FEZES were not difficult to come by. Many of the men already had collected them from fallen foes as souvenirs, and there were enough defunct Turks in the vicinity to supply the rest.

When they were mustered again in the village street, the dirty, soiled Fusiliers, in their red caps, looked for all the world like a column of Anatolian infantry. Nicolo had

been equipped with an officer's uniform and was perched upon his mule, the ammunition boxes having been emptied to refill the depleted pouches of the company. McConaughy stood beside him, awkward in a sword-belt and dangling saber.

"Hassan Futeh is the place we are to head for," announced Father Cashin after a prolonged discourse with the ex-muleteer. "'Tis a mite av a fishin' village on the Aegean coast, an' there's a chance—if we get there—we could be findin' a vessel of some kind laid up by the blockade. But to get there will be a long journey from all I can make out."

"How far will it be?" demanded McConaughy impatiently.

Father Cashin and Nicolo consulted again.

"Well, from all I can hear, the matter will be this wise," said the priest. "Nicolo says we must cross to the road on the straits side av the peninsula. From here by that road 'tis fifty miles to Sharkoi, an' from Sharkoi 'tis thirrrty miles across the hills to Hassan Futeh."

"A two days' march," commented one of the Fusiliers' officers.

"Yes," said Father Cashin, "two days av uncommon harrd marrchin', although me friend tells me we will not be havin' to go the whole distance to Sharkoi. Now, do ye remember this, all av ye: Nicolo is the one av us that speaks Turrkish. 'Tis he will do the talkin' when we meet our Allies on the road. 'Tis meself will give the orrdhers in German. I once spent a month in a convent at Cologne. Leave it to me. I'll be roarin' the like av a hauptmeister."

"Hecht!" said McConaughy. "'Ye'd best gie us a worrd beforehand so that we'll know your wants."

"Divil a fear, McConaughy. Ye'll do me proud. But 'tis not likely the need will arise. The Turrks from this to Constantinople are far too worried wid the progress av events to make trouble for 'emselves about a few wanderin' German soldiers. If any av them turnn inquisitive—why, lave them to Nicolo an' me."

It was just dawn as the weary column marched out of the bloody street of the little village, and up the valley toward the Dardanelles. Behind them still sounded the clamor of the fighting, for the Turks were now launching vigorous counter-attacks against certain advanced positions retained

by the British troops. But in the section of country traversed by the Fusiliers not an enemy was encountered.

They were descending a side track to the main road, which wound the length of the peninsula, behind the central crest of hills, when they met their first Turks, a dusty battalion of infantry, hastening to brace the fighting-line.

Several of the Turkish officers hurled questions at Nicolo, who answered them briefly, and as the Fusiliers toiled by, terribly conscious of the hundreds of eyes peering at their sweat-masked faces from under turbaned brows, they heard again and again, the muttered words:

"Franks! Ger-man Franks!"

But none of these glances displayed suspicion, and the Fusiliers passed triumphantly through their first ordeal. Father Cashin clapped Nicolo on the back, as soon as they had rounded a turn in the road, and the plodding Turks were out of sight.

"Isn't he the broth av a fine little man, me Maltese friend?" he exclaimed to McConaughy. "Harrk now to what he was afther telling the gullible officers we just left. He says to them that we were German artillery from the lower forrts, goin' up on special duty, an' that we were afther stoppin' off on our way to join in the scrap beyond. An' more than that, the spalpeen closed our trail by tellin' 'em we had wiped out a few av the English that got inside the lines at that village."

Tired as they were the Fusiliers and the *Joan's* men kept on the march until nearly noon.

"There's no time to be lost," said McConaughy in reply to pleas for an earlier rest. "Any minute we may be meetin' wi' some staff officer or general who'll know too much to believe our story. I'm no marcher nor are ma men here, but we'll keep up wi' ye, happen what may, if ye do but set the pace."

And grumbling, the Fusiliers kept on.

They had a brief rest in the early afternoon, sheltered by a grove of olive-trees beside a spring on a hillside some distance off the road. Here they ate the emergency rations they had carried into action with them, and lay down, sleeping or listening to the persistent roar of the battle off to their left. At four o'clock the remorseless McConaughy had them up again.



FOR hours and hours they plodded on, past endless streams of transport vehicles, carrying munitions to the troops at the front, past sullen-looking, downcast battalions of reserves, pushing along through the dust, with heads bowed down. For the most part these aliens paid no attention to the little column of Europeans. Whenever an officer did address an inquiry, he was answered by Nicolo, who, duly primed by Father Cashin, talked mysteriously of some great coup which was planned for his command at the base of the peninsula. And the Turks, already taught to look upon the Germans as demi-gods and miracle workers, watched their "allies" file by with wonder on their simple faces.

At nightfall it was Nicola and Father Cashin who held up a passing transport train and by display of arrogant authority and an overbearing manner, compelled the surrender of some sorely needed food. With this spoil, the Fusiliers again left the road and sought shelter in a gully which sloped down towards the straits. They had covered nearly forty miles, and even McConaughy admitted they had earned a rest. But with the daylight he roused them again.

"There's three times the danger there was yesterday," he said. "Yesterday all we met were more interested in the fightin' than aught else. Today 'twill be different. I'm none so confident as I was."

For several miles nothing happened. The road was not so thronged as it had been the day before, nor was the roll of firing so loud and unceasing. Nicola had halted on a little rise to point out Sharkoi in the distance, saying that they could turn off at the next crossroads and strike across the hills by less frequented paths, when McConaughy's keen sight singled out a group of horsemen approaching them.

"Take a look at your parrrty, Cashin," he said.

Father Cashin pursed up his lips.

"A staff," he said.

"How many do you make it?"

"Three—four—five—is there another? No. Yes, five."

"It might be worrse," commented McConaughy. "But we must ha' sharrp worrk. If ye do not object I'll use ma own men. They're smarrrter at this manner o' warfare."

"What would be your meanin'?" demanded the priest.

McConaughy explained at length.

"Troth, you're as mad as the rest av us," returned Father Cashin at last. "But madness has carried us this far. I'm agreeable."

He looked at the other officers of the Fusiliers, who nodded their assent.

McConaughy went down the column and singled out ten men to whom he whispered instructions. Then he gave certain orders to their comrades, and the Fusiliers resumed the march.

A mile farther on they met the approaching horsemen, all handsomely mounted and equipped. The leader had a blond mustache, but the others manifestly were Turks, of the snappy, young Turk type. They drew rein as the column advanced, and the Fusiliers parted right and left and flowed around the group of horsemen, halting only at an order snapped in Turkish which was translated by Nicolo to Father Cashin.

Nicolo, of course, started his usual explanation in fairly fluent Turkish, but was interrupted almost immediately by the officer with the blond mustache.

"Strange," said he. "I had not been advised of this movement."

Nicolo looked uncomfortable, but shrugged his shoulders.

"It is possible the Effendi does not——"

"Don't you know who I am?"

"I have seen the face of the Effendi, but——"

"You fool, I'm Scharnholz Pasha."

Nicolo bowed to his mule's neck. Scharnholz Pasha was the chief of staff of the German commander-in-chief in those parts, actually in command of the operations on Gallipoli.

"Do you speak German?" continued the Teuton commander.

"I—yes—no—that is——"

Nicolo floundered hopelessly, this being a contingency which had not been foreseen.

"How do you talk with the Germans you are guiding, then?" pressed Scharnholz, giving him no time to rally his wits.

"I—we speak in Italian," stammered the Maltese.

"So? You are a fine interpréter!"

Scharnholz turned to the nearest officer of the column, who happened to be McConaughy, and propounded a question in German to him. McConaughy blinked, then sensed that the psychological moment for action had arisen. He whistled shrilly

and grasped Scharnholz Pasha by one boot-leg; a sailor took hold of the other, and before the German officer realized what had happened he was sprawling in the dust and his arms were strapped in his own sword-belt. At the same moment a pair of the *Joan's* men unhorsed each of the Turkish officers and bound them. They were frightened and bewildered, but not so Scharnholz Pasha. He bellowed and he writhed and he champed his teeth.

"What's he afther sayin'?" asked McConaughy curiously.

"He says ye are English pigs," began Father Cashin.

"What?" bellowed McConaughy, leaping forward and thrusting his fist in the German's face. "Tell him if he says that again, I'll unstrap his hands an' give him the lickin' he desarrves. English! I'll teach him to dishonor an honest man!"

But Scharnholz Pasha was not so easily quieted. It required a gag and the personal administrations of Jock Grant to silence him. Jock and a Fusilier almost as big led him along between them with great solicitude, endeavoring to obtain lessons in the goose-step.

Father Cashin, Nicolo, and the Fusiliers' officers were mounted on the captured horses—McConaughy flatly declined to have anything to do with such an untrustworthy means of locomotion. Thanks to the summary fashion in which their prisoners had been taken, the incident on the roadway passed unnoticed, although the minaret of Sharkoi mosque gleamed in the near distance across a clump of cypress-trees.

Within five minutes, the column was on the march once more, the prisoners swallowed up in their midst, and in a quarter of an hour they had turned into the crossroad this side of Sharkoi, which led them through a sparsely settled country of hills and rough valleys that grew wilder and more desolate as they advanced toward the Ægean coast.

Here they met occasional patrols of Turkish cavalry and pack-trains carrying provisions to the troops and batteries scattered along the littoral of the peninsula, but there were no troop movements on a large scale. It was plain that they were entering a tract of country which the Turks did not deem in imminent danger of invasion.

"Will ye look at it all?" demanded McConaughy, sweeping his arm about the barren sky-line. "Twould ha' been ours for

the takin', but did the English think o' that? Not they! They were afther pickin' out the best fortified pousection the Turrks had established."

Nobody gainsaid him.

Once a Turkish patrol hailed them for news, but otherwise they were not stopped. The peasant population took to earth at the sight of armed men of any complexion, as is customary in the East.

When they halted at sunset on a ridge, whence they caught a far-off glint of silvery waters, Nicolo told them they were within ten miles of Hassan Futeh. And throat-parched, hungry, foot-blistered, but undaunted, the men who afterward became famous in camp-fire narrative as McConaughy's Disloyal Marine Light Infantry raised a joyous cheer.

It was thought inexpedient to light fires, but there was a chance to rest and the leaders held a brief council.

"Do we push on or wait?" propounded McConaughy.

The Fusilier officers were all for quick work. Push on, they advised, now that they were so close, and not risk any interposition of fresh Turkish forces.

"Tis thrue we're in ignorance av the stren'th the Turrks may have at Hassan Futeh," admitted Father Cashin.

"Ask the Maltese Napoleon does he know would it be likely the Turrks would ha' a garrison there?" suggested McConaughy.

"Betther yet, why not ask our prisoners?" returned the priest.

"Tis worth thryin'," agreed McConaughy.

The prisoners were dragged up, the Turks limp and fearful, Scharnholz making a pitiful attempt to carry his exhaustion with a swagger.

"We'll begin wi' this son o' the Hone-zollens," instructed McConaughy. "Cashin, tell Nicolo to ask him if there are Turrks at Hassan Futeh."

"Hassan Futeh!" exclaimed von Scharnholz in perfectly good English. "What do you want at Hassan Futeh?"

"So, ma man, ye ha' concealed from us your fameeliarity wi' English?" said McConaughy.

"Faugh, you never asked me," retorted the German. "I speak it better than yourself."

"A Gerrman wi' knowledge o' the Eng-

lish! He'll be an extraordinar' grand de'il!" asserted Jock Grant from his post beside the prisoner.

"Sure, we'll admit, 'tis the conjointure in one body av the two extremes av evil," said Father Cashin dryly. "But what interests me more is the prisoner's knowledge av the situation in the front av us. An' now that we convarrse face to face, I'll thank ye, Misther Scharnholz——"

"Colonel *von* Scharnholz!" snapped the prisoner with cholerick emphasis.

"Ye're not at Potsdam, me dear man," returned the priest calmly. "Be thankful we're not afther callin' ye the thrue names we kape for your like in moments of outrageous passion. Answer me question, please!"

Von Scharnholz gnawed his lips and appeared to be deep in thought. It was two minutes before he answered.

"But why on earth would you go to Hassan Futeh?" he inquired. "It's not a place of any value."

"Well," said McConaughy judiciously, after a glance from Father Cashin, "there'll be no reason for hidin' our principal anxiety. We ha' just fought our way through the Turrkish Army, an' we're lookin' for a likely seaport wi' means for reachin' our friends again."

Scharnholz seemed to be laboring under some excitement.

"But why go to Hassan Futeh, then?" he reiterated. "It is a mud-hole in the swamps, fever-ridden, with low water on the river-bar, and there are no boats."

"Do ye tell me so?" replied McConaughy curiously. "I'm surprised. 'Twas another story had been told to me before."

"You have been led astray, sir," insisted the German. "Any other place on the coast would serve your purposes better."

"What?"

"Kiskapan, for one. It's farther from here, but you'd have a chance of getting away."

There was a pause. McConaughy appeared to ponder, and von Scharnholz wet his lips feverishly.

"I'll guide you there," he volunteered.

McConaughy transfixed him with an eye that had met unflinching the wrathful might of the "Roaring Forties" and the ice-winds that blow through Magellan Straits.

"Ye ha' a strange, sudden interest in our fortunes," he remarked softly.

"I—I—I'm thinking of my own health," asserted the German. "You can't escape fever at Hassan Futeh—and there's no way out."

"Humph! Is it garrisoned?"

"Garrisoned?"

"Yes, that's what I said, man. Can ye not hear?"

"Why—why—no, it's not——"

"Not worrth garrisonin', ye would say?"

"Yes—that's, it."

McConaughy regarded him steadily for a minute.

"Tak' him away," he said to Jock Grant. "That's all."

Grant was leading the prisoner off, when McConaughy stayed him.

"How many Germans are at Hassan Futeh?" he roared.

"Wh—wh——"

The German's jaw dropped feebly, and for a fraction of a second he hovered on the verge of an answer. Then he pulled himself together and became again the smart, insolent officer he had been before the interview began.

"There is no need to ask me that question," he replied quietly.

"Hecht!" growled McConaughy, surveying his foeman's departing back. "I'm thinkin' there's every reason for askin' ye—an' suspectin' the two-faced, cunning deceit o' ye, in the bargain."

"I'll agree wid ye, McConaughy," said Father Cashin. "The devil was lyin' or I'll go back to the seminary. An' what now, gentlemen?"

"Hassan Futeh, by all means," said the senior Fusilier officer. "But we had better prepare for possible opposition, don't you think?"

"Opposection?" said McConaughy. "I hope so. I ha' never fancied returnin' from a voyage wi'out profits to show for it."

"I'm not a man av arrms," said Father Cashin, "but if ye'll harrk to my advice, me friends, ye'll delay the attack until the fore-end av the dawn. Then ye'll catch any enemies in their beds, an' our bhoys will have been refreshed by a scrap av sleep afther the day's long marrch."

"Will ye notice," McConaughy appealed to the others, "the bit Jesuit calls himself no man o' arrms? By the power o' the Presbyt'ry, he's the masher o' the English generals we ha' seen to this time!"

IV



HAZY in the swimming river mists, Hasszn Futeh lay beneath them. From the shelter of the coarse grass of the river embankment, McConaughy and Father Cashin stared down-stream at the huddle of fisher's huts dim in the gray light.

"Yes, there's shipping in the channel," said the Ulsterman; "but I canna make out what it is."

"And that large building at the far end av the village—what would ye call it?" asked the priest.

He pointed at a structure roughly built of logs and timber, which stood apart from the stone fisher huts and was noticeable by reason of its greater size.

"'Twill bear lookin' into," said McConaughy. "Here, Cashin, how will this be for a plan? Wi' half o' the men, includin' ma own crew, I'll seize the shipping; wi' the other half ye'll be cleanin' up the village. Isna that a fair diveesion o' labor?"

"All I'd be askin'," assented Father Cashin. "An' as you'll be havin' the more distance to cover, I'll await your fire before I go in."

McConaughy nodded, and, scrambling down the embankment, they told off their men, McConaughy being at pains to see to it that in the way of officers he drew only the youngest of the Fusiliers' subalterns. In the work before him he aimed to rely on his hard-headed marine executives.

The men were freshened by a long rest, which had preceded the final ten-mile tramp to their goal, and they struck out behind him at a swinging pace, as he led the way around the outskirts of the village to a position which would give them prompt access to the little clump of masts and indistinct hulls by the muddy strand.

The prisoners, securely bound, were left under a small guard.

They were close to the outlying houses before they obtained a clear view of the vessels in the river—as a matter of fact, it was little more than what in America would have been called a creek.

"There's a two-pole felucca," said McConaughy. "She's a tidy-sized craft."

"That wull be an unco sonsy quay for a Turrk fishin' village," commented Jock Grant.

"Ay," exclaimed Evan Apgar excitedly,

"an' whateffer will ye caall t'e craft at t'e end o' her? She's a motor boat or I nefer touch haand to engine again! An' a big 'un, skipper! 'Tis queer business, intee!"

McConaughy's fingers dug into Jock Grant's arm with a vigor that made even the brawny Scotchman wriggle.

"Jock man," he whispered, "do ma eyes deceive me or—hecht! What will be the shape lyin' t'other side the quay?"

Apgar saw it at the same moment.

"Naame o' John Wesley!" he muttered piously. "A submarine!"

"Or the beginnin's o' one," amended Grant. "Look carefu', an' ye wull note her deckin' is no complete."

McConaughy chuckled silently to himself.

"Sma' wonder our brass-bound prisoner would ha' turned us from the road to Has-san Futeh! Well, ma men, Providence ha' sprinkled bountifu' rewardds upon us. Be worrthy o' your forrtune. *Joan's* men, step for'ard! Ye'll attend to the shipping. Mr. Grant, ye'll seize the felucca; Mr. Apgar will seize the motor-boat; I'll tak' care o' the submarine. The Fusiliers will cover us an' lend whatever supportt may be needfu'. We'll attack."

A Moslem fisherman stepped to his doorway to eye the day's weather as McConaughy's column swept by. He squealed and retired precipitately. Lest the man give the alarm, McConaughy fired a shot in the air to warn Father Cashin to launch his attack; and as the *Joan's* crew swarmed down to the river-bank a rattle of rifle-fire told them the priest's force was meeting with opposition. But their own task proved childishly easy.

Two Teuton faces, heavy with sleep, rose from the unfinished hull of a small submarine by the well-built stone quay—evidently a job done by the Germans, for Turks would never have wasted Allah's time on such labor—but they cowered down at sight of the rifle-muzzles thrust against them. A lone sentry in the motor-boat across the quay was caught in his bunk.

On the felucca Jock Grant found nobody at all. Ten or a dozen small undecked fishing boats were equally deserted, while in the village not a face was visible at door or window. The Turkish peasant, with characteristic phlegm, awaited whatever end fate might have in store for him. In the meantime, he did not tempt that fate by appearing in its way.

As soon as McConaughy had made certain of his spoils, he led all the Fusiliers under his command to assist in the attack upon the large building, which was evidently the barracks of the German sailors who had been building the submarine. He found Father Cashin's detachment lying in a circle around the house, firing at doors and windows and sustaining a fairly heavy fire in reply.

"Many a poor bhoy's life would pay if we were afther rushin' the place," said the priest. "'Tis not worth it."

"Ye're right," McConaughy admitted. "Ha' ye summoned 'em to surrender?"

"Divil a chance have I had till now, what wid the mad rush av things. Is all well below?"

"Yes. Where's Nicolo?"

The Maltese, at sound of his name, bobbed up from behind a clump of bushes, whence he was firing a rifle with great industry and negligible effect.

"Bid the Eyetalian call out in Turrkish that 'tis hopeless for them to resist, an' if they give in they shall ha' quarrther!"

Nicolo did so in an intermission of the firing, but without result.

"Do you the same in German—if ye can," said McConaughy next.

"If I can!" snorted Father Cashin.

Nevertheless he stumbled through an involved sentence in German, between intermittent blasts of firing. And still there was no answer.

"No use," said McConaughy. "'Tis a harrd choice. Daylight is here, an' we should not linger, yet I would not ha' men killed at the end o' the venture."

"If we had only a bit av a bomb, like them ye——"

"Ye ha' the proper conception," McConaughy cut him short. "'Tis that or nothin'. Bide here an' do not let any young fools come to their finish."

He disappeared in the scrub, and after he had placed several houses between himself and the German position, he started for the quay at a run. Here he dived into the half-finished shell of the submarine, seeking like a setter on a warm trail from end to end, until he found what he wanted. This he carefully examined, then tucked it under his coat and set out on his return to Father Cashin on the firing-line.

"What have ye there?" demanded the priest.

"Hecht!" returned McConaughy jovially. "What but a bit giftie for they Germans!"

He held it up for inspection, then proceeded to fasten it upon the barrel of his rifle.

"By the looks av it, 'tis a wickid contrivance," said Father Cashin dubiously.

"Ye speak truth, Cashin. 'Tis a German time-bomb. One o' the things they hell-hounds ha' devised for the persecution o' poor, unoffendin' merrchant skipperrs like maself. If they willna give in, they shall ha' a taste o' their own medicine. Tell 'em so."

"I'm none so sure me vocabulary will go that far," returned the priest, "but I'll do me best."

While he was in the middle of his exhortation, McConaughy elevated the bomb on the end of his rifle. Perhaps it was Father Cashin's eloquent portrayal of the possibilities involved in the discharge of the missile down the gentle slope towards the barracks that turned the trick. But it is more likely that McConaughy's ocular proof of what was impending satisfied the imaginations of men who were fully acquainted with the action of the chemicals composing that particular bomb. At any rate, there was an abrupt cessation of firing, and an officer waving a white handkerchief appeared to demand terms.

"Unconconditional surrender," answered McConaughy firmly.

Five minutes later the terms were accepted, and twenty-eight Germans, three of them wounded, gave themselves up.

These prisoners, together with those previously taken, were placed on board the felucca in the river, with an adequate guard, and the remainder of the invaders turned their attention to making a thorough job of wrecking what would otherwise have been a busy nest of commerce destruction.

Additional time-bombs sufficed for the demolition of the workrooms and barracks and the submarine herself. Then the bulk of the Fusiliers were put on board the felucca with the prisoners, and McConaughy and his officers in the motor-boat took the sailing craft in tow. The powerful low-speed gasoline engine, built for just such a purpose, made no work of pulling the felucca down with the tide, and when they had passed between the flat river-banks and out over the bar, the felucca raised her lateen sails and added several knots to their hourly progress.

By nightfall they were well out in the Ægean and keeping a sharp watch for British picket-boats.

"'Twould be a dour end tae a pleasant parrrty for the English to sink us for Germans noo," suggested Jock Grant, as he nursed the motor-boat's wheel and peered ahead into the fathomless darkness.

"Thaat can not be, Jock," said Evan, as he wiped his hands slowly on a piece of waste—it was the first he had fisted in many a day and the greasy feel of the cotton was good to him. "T'e Maltese brought luck to us. While we 'ave him we are saafe, what-effer."

"Wad ye call that a Christian theory?" demanded Jock indignantly.

"I be as Christian as t'yself," retorted Evan. "Mark t'e words——"

A hail, raucous and foreign, split the night to starboard.

McConaughy, who had been listening idly to the dispute, waked Father Cashin, who sat asleep beside him, and Father Cashin dragged Nicolo from his comfortable berth close to the engine. Again came the hail—Heaven only knows why it had not been preceded by a shot or a torpedo. In those seas at night a boat on picket generally fired first and hailed afterwards. But the commander of that destroyer may have glimpsed through his night-glasses something odd about the pounding little motor-boat and the rakish felucca that rolled along behind her.

The polyglot muleteer promptly answered the second hail, and presently a lean, ferocious shape, silent as death, slid up beside them and the blinding white glare of a searchlight beat upon their faces.

"The French destroyer *Artemis*," said Father Cashin hurriedly. "I hope——"

The interpreter with which every ship of the Allied fleets was provided, now appeared on the destroyer's bridge.

"Ahoy, there!" he called. "Who are you people?"

"Numbers Two and Four companies, Royal West Galway Fusiliers, an' the master and crew o' the Red Funnel Liner *Joan o' Arc*—transport H-532," McConaughy thundered back. "Wi' thirrtty-odd German prisoners—an' some Turks," he added as an afterthought. "Most o' us are on the felucca, an' she's none too comfortable. Will ye stand by us?"

"We will," came the answer.

The searchlight danced off across the waters in a precautionary hunt for submarines. The men on the motor-boat caught a brief vision of a torpedo tube swinging away from them.

"Now, will ye caall me unchristian?" grinned Evan to Jock Grant. "If t'e-Maaltese Eyetalian haad not t'e gift o' tongues, where would we be, whateffer?"

Jock shook his head.



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers.

THIS has to do with one of the lost mines of the Southwest:

I wonder if any of the readers of *Adventure* could give us a history of the old lost Adams or Austin mine—supposed to be located in the northwest corner of the Navajo Indian country—or rather in the Piute country near the junction of the San Juan and Colorado Rivers. In 1883 two brothers by the name of Taylor from Colorado and myself made a trip for the purpose of hunting for this lost mine. We went from the line of A. and P. Railroad—through the Moqui Indian Pueblo and Keams Cañon and pretty thoroughly explored the Navajo mountain country, but found no mine. Previously two armed and equipped expeditions had been in there for the same purpose—one from Pueblo, Colorado, and one from Phoenix, Arizona. I was personally acquainted with one of the party from Phoenix who told me the whole history of the lost mine. If any reader remembers anything of these expeditions it would be interesting reading.—Wm. BROCKWAY, Havana, Cuba.

THIS is a letter from a real American. I call him that not because he and his ancestors happen to have lived in this country for over a century and a half, but because, being here, he recognizes his duty to his country and, recognizing it, *acts*.

I have three boys that will be men in the next ten or fifteen years and they are going to be real Americans as their ancestors have been for six or seven generations. Some of our family have borne arms since first the Tharps came to America in the 1750's, and I reckon some of them will continue to do so if I have a voice in the matter.

I "did my bit" and would be "somewhere in Mexico" today if I was single, but I shall do what more I can right here in the heart of peace-loving Iowa.

Am a member of the Legion, No. 4004, and wear

my button and am planning on starting a campaign for more members at once. The *Legion Call* was received recently and read from cover to cover and I heartily approve of same.

NOT long ago I started a movement in this little town to organize a National Rifle Club and by hard work and persistency finally organized one and am the executive officer for it. We have 50 members who have paid their year's dues (\$4.00) in advance, an indoor range and will have an outdoor range as soon as our supplies get here. Tried to organize a National Guard but Adj. Gen. Logan decided the town was too small, but we have hopes of a machine-gun platoon.

This place is the center of a large German settlement and of course we are handicapped somewhat by their views and the fact that many are rabidly pro-German.

I am keeping everlastingly at it however and I never miss an opportunity to talk, live and work for preparedness.

Hoping that eventually we shall see America in the place she justly belongs.—M. A. THARP, Grundy Center, Iowa.

THE man who wrote the verses is dead—"shot at Wuchang, China." But what he wrote voices a code that does not die:

Have found your magazine in many queer places around the world. Some of the stories I have read, especially those of India and the South Seas, strike close to home with me and I have read many a "fictional" story in *Adventure* that I know has been based on actual facts. I can't write—I wish I could—but the accompanying verses were given to me by a soldier and a gentleman, the night before he was shot at Wuchang, China. He was an Englishman, by name McRae, parents Scotch but born in England. First name Donald.

There must be a lot of his friends alive in the world who would appreciate these verses and if you could find a place by your Camp-Fire for a "hidden

voice from out the dark" it would be greatly valued by his old-time comrade.—DOUGLAS McIVOR, Seattle, Wash.

A MAN

By D. McRAE

Do you think I would sacrifice all of myself,
For the sake of a woman that's wrong;
The pain of my mother, the pride of my dad
And the strength of a man that is strong?

Do you think that I'm saintly and read the Good Book,
To discover the path that is straight,
With a streak that is "yellow" hand-painted by Fear
"Oh, confess; for it might be too late?"

So you think that I haven't got pride of my own,
Which I value, Aye! more than my life,
Do you think I am heartless, a thing made of stone,
With my hand on the hilt of a knife?

I'll be ready to go, when I'm summoned, that's all,
With the millions of others along,
And I'll go like a man when I answer the Call,
For I've sinned like a man that is strong.

I'll answer my name when the Roll-Call is read,
And I'll step out in front, if I can,
Tho' my sins be as black as the graves of the dead
I'll 'fess up to Him like a man.

TIBURON ISLAND (there is no question, I think, that there is only one island of this name) comes to the front again:

While *en route* from San Diego (in December, 1912), to Indianapolis, I scraped up an acquaintance with a man who told me that his name was Richard Soullier and that he had prospected in "California Baja," in Sonora and Colorado. Of Tiburon (he pronounced it Tee-bore-on) he told me this:

"WHILE in San Rosala (Lower California), I heard that there were great riches in stones, viz.: emeralds, yellow diamonds and blue stones (I suppose he meant blue turquoise) on Tiburon Island, but the natives were cannibals and had such savage natures that they never allowed a stranger to hunt for them unmolested.

"This was told me by the Padre Igocilla at the San Rosala Mission. He further said that should I attempt to go there, I would have to go alone as I could get none of the natives to accompany me. This I found to be true, and after I tried to persuade a few of the curly-haired, blond natives to go, I gave it up. I didn't care to stir up trouble with a lot of warlike savages like I heard the Tiburones were."

Personally, I think Mr. Soullier heard a great deal of the legendary gossip which is so common about little-known and remote parts of Mexico among the natives of isolated communities.

FAR be it from me to attempt to "throw cold water" on any project to dig into hidden places. If I were not hitched to Indianapolis by the necessity of furnishing the provender for a family of four, I would certainly want to join in helping to dig and search for treasure on Tiburon or any other promising place.

And I would, too, even if I had to go alone. But to get back to the real "dope" I had in mind. I will

set forth what Mr. Arthur Walbridge North says in his "Camp and Camino in Lower California" about Tiburon Island:

"WHILE at Los Flores (So. Calif.) I sought eagerly for additional news in regard to the Seri Indians, concerning whom I had read already in old chronicles, and whom my *mozo* had spoken of in latent bitterness. These people inhabit Tiburon Island or Shark Island, a barren, rocky stretch of land some ten leagues long by four or five in breadth, lying off the Sonora coast, opposite the Aguaje San Juan. Though its greatest heights attain an elevation of five thousand feet, there are only three considerable water-holes on the entire island. From the Summer of 1540, when Hernando de Alcoron, one of Cortez's admirals, finding the surrounding sea swarming with voracious sharks, gave the island its name, viz.: 'Tiburon Island,' it has been a place of ill repute amongst men.

"Its inhabitants, a race of splendid physique and marvelous fleetness, known as the Seri, were reported by Don Rodrigo Maldonado, an officer of Coronado, as being 'so large and tall that the best man in the Spanish army reached only to their chests.' Indeed, there is excellent reason to believe that out of the Spanish tales of the Seri were created, through an author's imaginative brain, the Brobdingnagians of Dean Swift. At the same time it is no wild phantasy to surmise that Tiburon is the same island that Cortez had in view when he sent his admirals in search of California, 'the land of the Amazons'; certainly the Seri women exercise an unusual control of affairs in Tiburon, and all kinship is reckoned in the female line.

"PRIOR to the middle of the 17th century, the inhabitants of the island were reputed to be cannibals, a stigma which still attaches to them; by the opening of the 18th century their animosity had become proverbial.

"Neighboring Indian tribes, Spaniards, Mexicans, Americans, indeed all visiting aliens, have found the Seri inexplicably treacherous and hostile. Non-agricultural barbarians, scantily garbed in pelican skins, partial to meat uncooked and to the unspeakably disgusting 'second crop' of the cacti, these isolated aborigines are possessed of a pride of blood so fierce and intense that to intermingle their own with that of an alien is an indefensible crime.

"The Seri are essentially warriors. During three centuries last past over fifty recorded attempts have been made to subjugate them. Cunning, possessed of unequalled endurance and a demoniacal lust for blood, they have repulsed or eluded all comers.

"IF AS many as five hundred of the tribe yet survive, then an accurate cost to Mexican war parties would be \$200 per head. While they carry long bows, they seem to be more partial to *huffs* or handy boulders, and to their teeth and hands. That they used poisoned arrows is a charge made against them two centuries past. It is said that they obtain the deadly venom by pressing their arrow points against partially hollowed, putrefied livers, within which a repulsive mass of centipedes, tarantulas, and rattlesnakes have been stored, warring until death.

"Lithe, deep-chested, of rather comely figures and well-proportioned bodies, the strength of the Seri is as extraordinary as their lust for slaughter.

Separated from the Sonora mainland by the treacherous waters of a narrow strait, well-termed 'Boco Inferno' (Mouth of Hell) and 'Infernillo' (Little Hell), they dexterously impel their frail canoes (*balsas*) across the swirling waves, carrying plunder with them from the inland nations.

"INDEED, at low tide, it is said that they breast these waters without artificial support, carrying on their shoulders great reeking quarters of stolen beef. Working in concert, moreover, four Seri will run down a deer or mountain sheep, beating out its brains with *huffs*. Many of the men exceed six feet in height.

"Meager in its vocabulary, the language of these people has been variously ascribed to Arabian, Welsh and Patagonian original. In their worship, the turtle and the pelican are the chief tutelaries.

"So many of the visitors to Tiburon Island, however, have disappeared, leaving no sign, that most knowledge of the people and their customs is traditional and veiled in uncertainty. Of recent travelers who have never returned from the Seri I will mention two San Francisco correspondents, murdered there in 1894, a party of prospectors who effected a landing in 1896, two traders who were made away with in 1898, and finally the Grindell party of last year, 1909. Well indeed did a scientist of the Smithsonian Institute characterize the natives of Tiburon Island as "the most primitive, the most blood-thirsty of the Indians of North America."

YOU will kindly note that Mr. North, though referring mainly to the inhabitants of the island, does not infer that there is more than one island called Tiburon. I have been searching for evidence of this and in all chronicles, history, navigators' maps, etc., I have been able to peruse, I can find nothing that would lead one to believe there is more than one Tiburon Island.

I have never been west of Chichihua City in Sonora and though I have been near the Lower California border, I have never heard that there was a group of islands bearing this name. I have spent two years in Yucatan and Guatemala and hope some time (if I ever find that elusive quantity) to write about it. (I am a mechanical engineer and I am busy twelve hours a day.)

At least, I think I have some good material about the haciendas, sisal country and Maya Indians, the true descendants of the Aztecs, and the *actums* (caves), etc.

Anyway, I hope the information herewith may be of some use and I would like to hear from any who are interested.—CLAYTON MARSH, 1338 Barth Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.

ARE YOU A QUITTER?

READ the following letter. Possibly it will make your blood boil. Possibly it will make you blush with shame. Possibly it will make you as bitter as the writer. I do not know him. I do not know whether or not what he says is true. Quite justifiably he asks that his name be not published.

But whether the things he says are true or not, other things like them are true in the United States, our country, and the

same kind of problem that confronts the writer of this letter confronts us all. Shall we give the same answer that he gives? Or is there something back of and beyond these things, something that claims our allegiance in spite of them?

It is not a question of the Philippines alone nor of war alone, but of the whole country in peace or war, now and in the future, under whatever Administration and in whatever circumstances. It is even bigger than that.

Read the letter:

While I doubt very much as to your publishing the following, I have a load on my chest every time I read of your Legion stunt and am going to trust to your fairness to get rid of some of it at any rate. Let me premise with the statement that I have been a reader of your magazine since long ago. Also that, while I do not consider myself as in the adventurer class strictly speaking, still I hold three U. S. Army discharges, two for war service, and have had some experience in roughing it—in short would consider myself the material the doctor ordered if we were to have war. Have for the last sixteen years resided in the Philippines and would probably be especially valuable here.

NOW then I wouldn't join the Legion nor in fact would I be especially anxious to serve at all in case of foreign war. *Porque?* First and foremost, the modern murder-industry is most decidedly unhealthy; when people take to chucking manslaughter around in two-hundred-pound chunks it should take more than a mere desire for adventure or excitement to draw and hold men to the firing-line. In other words the day, to my notion, has passed when a flag and some silver-tongued orator, who never goes himself, can spiel patriotism and get enlistments. Nowadays a country must show benefits accorded to its citizens and protection granted, and the respect of foreigners secured for its people when in other countries.

Plainly, for my part, if I am to pack a gun and risk my hide for my country, my country must be prepared and willing to, not risk its life perhaps, but at least to see that while I behave myself I am accorded and receive full protection and a square deal in any country in the world. Also that, *maskee* army and navy officers or Tammany politicians, none but American citizens are given government employment, whether at home or abroad.

FOR fifteen years in these islands I have seen every effort made by the Insular Government to impress on the native that an American, especially an ex-soldier, was about the lowest thing in the ship in law or influence. At the present writing, as admitted in the newspapers by the present Governor-General, there are ninety-six (96) foreigners in the Insular service, which, as I don't suppose we have over 500 supposedly American Insular employees altogether, would appear a fairly good percentage. In the Federal service as represented by the Quartermaster Department here, we have never been able to secure even a permanent Chief Clerk who had been born in the States; while at the present

writing, and when every States-bound transport carries half a dozen or more "vagged" ex-soldiers, we have several men drawing down good salaries who have never seen the United States, let alone being citizens, while probably twenty more are not naturalized.

IT USED to be considered quite humorous in the early days for some native to ask you if there were no Americans who talked English, but it isn't near so funny now when jobs are scarce. Let an American, especially a veteran, get out of work and see how quickly he is vagged and given his choice between "six-months' hard" and going to the States. Then watch a lime-juicer or a Dutchman or a Swiss out of a job. Their respective countrymen will never see any of them vagged. Not on your life. The first will get a job on the Manila & Dagupan R. R., the second will go into the saloon or sugar business, and the third will try jewelry. If they are too ignorant for these jobs why they will be started on some Government job at a good salary. In any case their chow and clothes are provided, and wo to the cop who vagged them! A consul would be seeing the G. G. *en seguida*.

NOW look at the treatment accorded the American in the provinces or even at times in Manila, when he is, as are most veterans, without influence or pull. I suppose fifty or more ex-soldiers and others have been killed or injured seriously by the municipal police in the islands since Taft first described us as "camp-followers" in 1901. I think I am correct in saying that no policeman, scout or constabulary man has ever been executed for a crime of this nature and that, when punished, a short term in prison has generally been the limit of the punishment imposed. As to justice there is no question that the American in the provinces suffers both in taxation and in court, unless he either spends money or has influence.

NOW most of these things, while actually done by natives are not strictly chargeable to them but rather to the spirit inculcated, and instructions given, by the Americans in power, some of whom are right now among the loudest advocates of conscription and preparedness. Furthermore, after discharging thousands of soldiers in these islands, to "cast in their lot with the islands" as the old discharge orders of 1901 read, and virtually encouraging even to this day such discharges, the U. S. Government is now preparing to abandon the islands, thus forcing many old-timers here either to abandon hard bought property, which under native rule will probably be worse than valueless, or to take chances under a native rule certain to be far more revolutionary than Mexico's. Also if married, as most of the early settlers are to native women, they must either abandon wife and children, or degenerate into the mixed white class of the new republic.

REMEMBER that most of the Americans of this type here have not only served their country in two wars but have given the better part of their lives to Government work in these islands, and you will not wonder at the remark often made here, "sitting on the fence to see them go by the next time." Instead of having a reserve of say 50,000 trained veterans in these islands, as could have been done by decently preferential treatment in land-

grants, etc., the U. S. has probably shipped back to the U. S. from here at least that many good men who in most cases have an awful grudge against the country, to say the least.

Do you suppose Germany would have done so? If Germany held these islands she would have prized every veteran, or even citizen whom she could induce to settle here, above a hundred foreigners, while natives, well, they wouldn't count at all. Looking at it from another standpoint, say a few of the principal clerks of the Quartermaster Department are of German birth and that we should have, as seems highly possible, a war with that country, couldn't a very few such clerks cripple our armies beautifully? Or, if you are pro-German, take the English. We have almost as many of those, and that contingency also appears possible. Or even in the Civil Government, a few foreigners owing allegiance to the country with whom we might be at war could do quite a little damage, especially in road and bridge work.

BUT even that does not appear to me to be the worst. Not long since I met a non-commissioned officer from Corregidor, that second Gibraltar on which the U. S. has expended some twenty millions more or less, and which has to secure drinking-water by special launch from Sisiman on the mainland to supply the post in peace. Struck by his fine appearance and his plenitude of money, I inquired from acquaintances as to his antecedents and found that he admitted being a former Prussian officer, dismissed for cause, and was not only one of the most important sergeants in his battery organization but his company commander intended making him top the first vacancy. His companions were all of German birth, and stationed at the Rock.

I may add that I scarcely imagine that the Japs are likely to trouble us any more *re* plans of the Rock, as their opportunities have been so unlimited that they are hardly likely to require anything further in that line there.

NOW the point of all this dope that appeals to me is: Does a country that neither protects its citizens against foreign aggression in time of peace, nor makes any attempt to take the slightest precautions against their undoing in time of war, have any right to ask for their services in the cause of preparedness? Right now in these islands, in case of absolute withdrawal of the United States forces and authority, an American citizen would be in great danger, not only of his property but of his life. And this danger would result not from any personal animosity in the most of cases, but rather from the contempt which the native has been taught not only for our Government and its authority, but for us individually.

FURTHERMORE, if the people of the United States knew the trickery and underground methods that have been used by the Civil Government here, not only during the present Administration but ever since the Big Brown Brother started it, they could better appreciate some of the diplomacy that Philippine-trained politicians are making use of in the home country. For example, events in Congress at home and in native and commercial circles out here at the present time point strongly to the truth of the story told some time ago that Wilson had secured peace from Japan in

return for his promise to turn over the islands to that power at the earliest opportunity.

Trusting that, if not something to publish, I have at least given you something to think about and to some extent have relieved my own mind I remain.—

Granting all the letter says is true, it is only one small example of the corruption that extends through all our public affairs, city, state, national. And what I say is that we have no right to complain about it. The corruption is there because we have allowed it to be there, you and I and this man from the Philippines. Is it a man's part to whine over what he himself has helped bring to pass? Or does a man turn to and *do* something to make things right?

I DO not quarrel with this man from the Philippines because of his bitterness over these things, for his taste of them has been bitter beyond the common lot. But when he says that because of the dry-rot he sees around him he does not care to serve his country, I stand against him. He is a quitter.

Does patriotism mean serving for reward and ceasing to serve if we are not rewarded?

AND I am thinking chiefly, not of the patriotism of guns and battles, but of patriotism in the great, unending war of peace—for the most part a dull, drab war of obscure and unknown skirmishes, without banners or bugles or "glory" or reward. Probably you yourself are the hero of a thousand unrecorded battles, and the coward and traitor of a thousand more.

I'M THINKING about the time you failed to vote, or voted ignorantly or for party or self-interest instead of country, of the little laws that all of us disregard, of the thousand times we've passed by a civic wrong we could have helped to right, of all the little things, so small we can keep no record of them, so "unimportant" they have brought no pang of conscience, yet which in their total give the final tally that shows whether we've been good citizens or bad, soldiers to be honorably discharged at death, or slackers.

I'm talking about bigger things, too—the betrayal or neglect of an office of public trust, great or small, of the rottenness in our public affairs that is visible to all who have eyes to see. But these bigger things are only the little things grown large, only the results of the little skirmishes that you and I and the man from the Philippines have lost.

WE WRANGLE over theories of government. No change in form of government will make a good nation out of bad citizens. Bad citizens, whether they live under a monarchical, republican, democratic or socialistic form of government, will make a rotten nation.

It is only foolish to whine over the rottenness of a government you yourself have helped to build, to turn your back on what is partly your own handiwork.

AFTER all, what is an Administration, or a government or a form of government? They are only a means toward an end, toward something beyond themselves and higher. What the world is fighting for is human justice and liberty. A man's country is not a piece of geography but a principle. We owe loyalty to our country not just because we are born or make our living on her soil but because, a century and a half ago, she stood forth among the nations to champion a higher justice and liberty than they had known before. If she falters in the fight it is our duty to make her arm stronger and her heart cleaner. If, as time goes on, she should aim still higher, it is *we*—you and I and the man from the Philippines as much as any one else—who must raise her aim.

Will you fight it out or will you be a quitter?

HERE is word again from our comrade Edward C. C. Genet, who, as you know, is serving in the French Foreign Legion. He has learned at first-hand just what modern warfare means, the difference between that and the old-fashioned methods and conditions of our war with Spain, the Civil War, and so on. Therefore he sees the cruel need of Preparedness in his own America. So, I think, does every one else who knows facts instead of talking fanciful theories.

Like Mr. Genet, I sincerely believe that our misrepresenting and falsely "patriotic" school histories are one of the main causes for our unpreparedness.

It is an extremely gratifying honor to me to have that letter of mine published in "Camp-Fire." It's the little things that always lead up to the big ones, so I ambitiously hope that that little letter will be the starter for many *more energetic* efforts on my own part toward boosting my country into thorough preparedness. Mark well that I say "thorough." I don't believe incompleting jobs ever brought much satisfaction.

It was Shakespeare who wrote: "All the world's

a stage and all the men and women merely players." That is surely very true, but, if we are players, we've got to act our parts well, little as they may be. To act one's part well one has to be sure of oneself. To be sure and confident one has to prepare—not at the last minute, for then one is sure to go wrong, but beforehand when there's sufficient time. If it is so with men, is it not indeed far more so with nations?

THE article "You and Your Country" is splendid. . . . It's a real call to duty where none need ask questions, for it's all down in simple understandable black and white. I like the classification of the types of patriots we have. They are to be met everywhere, particularly, I think, the type which believe, in their blind, foolish hearts that because they're free-born citizens of the United States they are all-powerful, immune from foreign hostility. I believe to them will be found the hardest problem of adequately bringing home the naked truth of our unpreparedness. They are the ones who, like myself, learned to believe, from the school history-books of our country, that Uncle Sam stood for "unconquerable"—that we always had been able to uphold the Monroe Doctrine and therefore there was no reason to believe that we shouldn't always be able to uphold it.

The lesson of the necessity of preparedness without militarism certainly should be taught while the future generations of our citizens, who will have to practise and uphold it, are still in their primary educational careers.

I QUIT everything the first chance I got to come over here to learn by *actual experience* the lessons of modern warfare so that, granting I live through it all, I can return and be of perhaps valuable service in the hour of need of my own country when that time comes.—EDWARD C. C. GENET, Régiment de Marche, de la Légion Etrangère, France.

THE following is in response to a "Camp-Fire" note concerning Jackson Gregory's "Yahoya" and the marvelous running ability of the Hopi Indians:

In Jamaica the "boys" who bring the fresh fish from the coast up to Mandeville often make the eighteen miles (all up hills) in less than four hours. Leave the coast at 5 A. M. and are selling the live fish at 9 in Mandeville.—EUGENE P. BRADLEY, South Boston, Mass.

THIS is the kind of testimony that ought to make the pacifists think:

Your idea of universal service is certainly the proper one, and only shirkers and four-flushers will oppose you. I am a trained man and it gives me cold chills to think of what would happen if we were compelled to go to war with raw, untrained men composing our main defense.—JOSEPH RIDEAUX, Chicago.

BACK ISSUES OF ADVENTURE

Note.—A department for our readers' convenience. Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1915; even 1915 is partly gone. Readers report that back *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Practically the only way to get special back copies or to fill out your files is to watch this department for offers made by

the few readers who are willing to sell or pass on stray copies or more or less complete files. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

May 1911: Nov. 1913: June, July, Aug., Oct., Nov., Dec., 1914: Jan, Feb, Mch., 1915. Your price, plus freight—Ralph Davis, Cresco, Ia.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card*—not in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying*.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure of*. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal.

Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Wallace's discretion, this service being purely voluntary.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding.—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O., \$1.00.

Red-Headed Regiment, Fred C. Adams, Chatham, N. Y. Gray-Headed Regiment, address Major Guillermo MacFergus, care *Adventure*.

Marine Corps Gazette, 24 E. 23rd St., New York.

For rifle clubs, Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Siar* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

MCCANN, ELMAN C. J., last seen at 107 W. 96th St., formerly worked on Quebec Bridge, Canada, for J. D. White Eng. Co., also worked as actor in movies as salesman and as Inspection Eng. at Belmar, N. J. Light complexion, 6 ft., age 23, weight 150 lbs., gray eyes. Does any one know of his whereabouts? Any information will be appreciated. Canadian papers please copy. Address—Mks. ELMAN C. J. MCCANN, care *Adventure*.

VAN PELT, ELLIS LOY ("Van") last heard from in El Paso, Texas. March 26, 1916 he wrote his mother he had received his discharge from the Army. He belonged to Co. H., 18th Infantry, 6th Brigade. Was editor of a paper in Douglas, Arizona, called "Brigade Bulletin" and was well acquainted with the soldier boys. He had also been a R. R. operator, stenographer and printer. Dark eyes, tall, small scar on temple, 22 years, and genial disposition. Mother and sister would like to hear from him.—Address MRS. V. N. LATTI, 702 West 11th St., North Platte, Nebr.

DUNCAN, JASPER N., last heard of in Salt Lake City or Anaconda. Owned mine at one time in Bozeman, Mont. Was an architect in Bozeman; also owned property which was called the "Duncan Brother's." Light brown hair, blue eyes, 6 ft. News gladly received by his loving sister. (Maiden name, ELLA DUNCAN.)—Address MRS. C. G. COKER, Winters, Yolo Co., Cal.

TAYLOR, CHARLES G., formerly in the Bureau of Construction and Repair of the U. S. Navy Department. Last heard of when he was at Cavite, P. I., and want to get into touch with him again. Please communicate.—Address DR. CHAS. M. BLACKFORD, Staunton, Va.

TON, W. R., was with me in San Francisco at "Kenilworth." Went to Seattle; relatives in Oceano, Cal.—Address AL. DECOSTE, care MRS. KATE GRAY, 50 Waverly St., Malden, Mass.

HOUSTON, W. T. D., (pronounced Euston) last heard of while attending school at Valparaiso, Ind. Later joined some insurgent faction in Mexico. Believed to have come from southeastern Mich., and to have relatives living there.—Address R. R. THOMPSON, 1025 Majestic Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

BRINTON, ARTHUR H., last heard of in San Diego Co., Cal., about 1894, then went to Honolulu, not heard of since. Fond of horses and horse-racing. 45 years. Came from Chester, Pa., where his father or uncle was in the banking business. Important news. Would like to hear from any one who knows him.—Address L. W. COX, 928 Diamond St., San Francisco, Calif.

MACKENZIE, THOMAS, telegraph dispatcher. Last heard of in Montana. This information received from his brother Jim who has enlisted with Mearns for overseas service. Communicate.—Address MRS. KENNETH MACKENZIE, 18 Melgund Ave., Ottawa, Ont., Can.

HULINGS, FRANK, was with me on trip from Houston to El Paso, 1911. Information wanted.—Address AL. DECOSTE, care MRS. KATE GRAY, 50 Waverly St., Malden, Mass.

DRINKWATER, EVERETT E., last heard from in Dinuba, Cal., August, 1915. Age 30. His brothers are anxious to hear from him.—Address F. M. & R. F. DRINKWATER, 45 North Ashland St., Worcester, Mass.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GILBERT, "Pink Pill," left Shanghai, China, two years ago. Bound inland.—Address FRED LUCAS, Box 81, Paradise, Mont.

HAWLEY OR HOLLEY, MRS. GRACE, last heard of in Leadville, Colo., about three years ago. Daughter Genevieve would be glad to communicate with you.—Address MRS. M. E. CARNER, 976-A-W-42nd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

DE LA COUR, JOSEPH W. (La Cour), served in the 27th Infantry of the United States Army in the Philippines in 1898 to 1901. Please communicate.—Address L. T. 334, care *Adventure*.

STRINGFELLOW, JESSAMINE, last heard of in Mexico City. Old friend who visited you there would like to hear from you.—Address FANNIE, 62 West 10th St., Atlanta, Ga.

SLIDER, ADA, last heard of in Washington (perhaps Seattle). Was in hospital. Forgot marriage name.—Address COUSIN FANNIE, care MISS EMILY RING, 62 West 10th St., Atlanta, Ga.

MARZ, last heard from in 'Prisco. My friend, where are you? Signs and Bisbee, Ariz., want to hear from you.—Address I. D., 6373, care *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

PERALTO, JOSE L., was with me in New Orleans, 1914. All-round athlete. Relatives living in San Francisco. Information wanted from friends.—Address AL. DE COSTA, care MRS. KATE GRAY, 50 Waverly St., Malden, Mass.

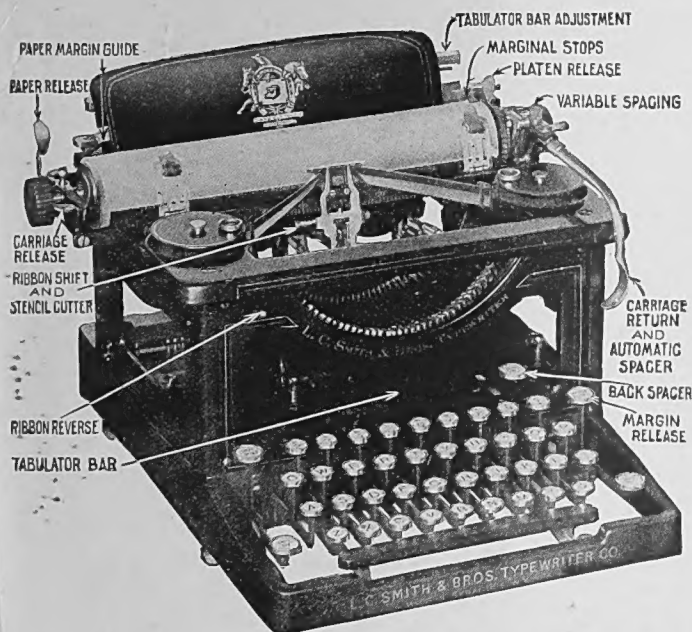
THE following have been inquired for in full in the September or October issues of Adventure. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ALLEN, ROBERT, formerly of Bucyrus, Ohio; Bradley, George Shiffer, last heard of in 1874; Burnham, Frank; Carey, Charles A.; Cecetka, A. F. (violinist); Cooke, James E. (half brother); Crowell, John J.; Dennis, Lee A.; Dodson, Lucion (L. H.); Gourley, John H.; Huber, Henry M.; Hunt, Arthur, operator in Signal Corps at Tbay, Panay, P. I.; Lockwood, J. A., formerly in Onaka, S. Dakota; McWorth, W. D. (Billy Mac); Martin, W. J., of Hacienda Manso Villa, Mex.; Noble, Washington, Arthur; Norris, Joe L., last heard of in Lima, Peru; Palmer, Glen; Richardson, Frank Eply; Schane, Ben., left New Orleans, Sept., 1915; Spanoro, Corporal A. T.; Spear, Dr., assistant surgeon U. S. Navy; West, M.; Wheaton, H. L.; Wootton, Charles; Workman, Edward.

MISCELLANEOUS: Any one knowing the whereabouts of the LaBlache (white) family that was settled in Southern States around Tenn. and Ark. during Civil War. Or family of John "Ambeau" will learn something of interest if they communicate at once; soldier of "E" Co. 38th Vols. stationed in Lipa, Batangus, P. I., in January, 1900; any of the crew of the U. S. Torpedo-boat Destroyer *Dals*, 1903-1906.

LAWRENCE STEWART, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, Mrs. Maude Thomas, Hastlar Gal Breath, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 284, C 293, W 311, W 312. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.



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If you had your arm in a sling for two years, the muscles would become powerless to lift a feather. That is exactly what happens when you neglect to exercise daily the will power of your brain. To recover the use of an atrophied muscle you would begin with a systematic and progressive course of exercise and training. To recover and to develop your will to the full limit of its powers, you must give it daily exercise and progressive training. And for this you need instruction and guidance—the help of the most remarkable book of recent years. Through "Power of Will" Frank Channing Haddock, Ph. D., the wizard developer of self powers, holds out a helping hand to you.

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